

THIS PORCELAIN CLAY

NAOMI JACOB

"This is the porcelain clay of human-kind'"
—Don Sebastian, Act I, Sc. I, DAYDREAM



35, 36 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

DEDICATION

To the mother of WINIFRED HOLBY
whose wisdom, understanding,
and love mean so much to
many people, including

MICKY.

Simpson, 1939.

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER ONE

THIS SILVERS WERE SOMETHINGS OF A MYSTERY. THIS THEY always had been from the beginning of Henry Silver's career, when he started by dwelling in a small four- roomed house in Scattergate, at Melbrough, and, for a living, trundled a fruit-barrow.

His wife was sufficiently simple. When asked where she came from she replied that, "Me Dad weet i' cloth trade i' Leeds," which was accepted because most people who came from Leeds were in some branch or other of the cloth trade--either making, selling or tailoring.

Silver was a different proposition. He was a small, sandy-haired man, with a very pink skin and small, sharp eyes the colour of a dull winter sky. He worked hard, harder than most men, calling down upon himself the reproach that he "sweated hissen ter skin and bone".

"And whaffer not?" Silver would ask. "I don't intend ter be shoving me barter all me life! I don't intend ter wink my guts out fur ever, mind that. I'm me own boss. I can work as many days a week, an' as many hours a day, as what I like." Then his lips would curl, and his eyes narrow. "I'm unt one as is at beek an' call o' t' Trade Unions an' Federations!"

His barrow prospered; his speckled apples, rather "sleepy" pears and thick-skinned oranges sold because they were cheap, and people, at that time, counted every penny, and "made do" with the second best of most commodities. Silver began to get money together, went from time to time to the bank, always to pay in, rarely to draw out.

He returned home one afternoon and, as he sat in the

easy chair reserved for his exclusive use by the kitchen fire, he announced, as he took off his boots :

"We're flattin' up' Munder, Mother."

"We're flattin'?" she retorted. "Henry, ween on earth to?"

He spat accurately into the fire. "Why, out o' this dapp-kennil," he said, "I never intended ter stop 'ere or 'ereabouts for ever. I've bought ayre, bought, not rented - a semi-detached villa i' Langland's Road. I'll tak' you up ter' ave a look at it after tea."

Surveying the house later, Jane Silver said, "It's no' a villa, it's a reit mansion!"

Silver wagged his sandy head. "Nothing in what we'll have i' a year or so." He never told her how the money had been made, and she never asked questions. She knew that a strange variety of men came to the house - well-dressed men with cultured voices and small dark men with big ears which seemed to stick out beyond the brims of their neat, hard hats ; there were even men with foreign voices, who waved their hands when they talked, and very easily grew excited and volatile. These people came to see Henry Silver, argued with him, protested, and finally accepted his terms.

In her vague, rather lazy way Jane wondered what Henry did to make money. She hated to ask questions ; she hated to exercise her brain except in given directions. She loved buying food, planning meals, making certain that not a speck of dust lingered in her meticulous clean house. Later, most of all she loved her children - Louis, David and Marjorie. She never speculated as to whether or not she loved Henry. He was her husband, the father of her children ; she supposed that, as such, she loved him, but she never attempted to analyse her feelings or assess them accurately.

When she first met him he had screwed up his small pale eyes and smiled. They had gone out together in the evenings ; sometimes he had taken her to the cheap

seats at the theatre, and on occasion he had bought her small, inexpensive presents. After three months' courting — during which time he scarcely ever addressed a word to her that the whole world might not have heard — he asked her to marry him. Rather, he stated that she was going to marry him.

Jane said, "Why, it's a bit sudden like, isn't it?"

"We've bin walking out niver three month!"

She giggled. "Yer're funny. Not like other chaps. Why, Ah'd not know when you wanted ter 'old hands, or kiss me, or anything like that."

"I'm not that kind. We'll be married in a month, I think. I've got t' chance of an opening at Melbrough. A good opening."

She said, as if the idea had occurred to her for the first time, "What is yer job, Henry luv?"

"Mine?" he replied. "Mine—why I buy an' sell same as what most chaps does. Only I buy anything, sell anything but" —he chuckled—"always at a profit!"

Jane's father hadn't been impressed by Henry. Old Benson snarled, drooped his immense white eyebrows down over his eyes, and demanded to know what Jane saw in the fellow.

"It's my belief that he's a Yid," Benson stated. "That's what he is!"

"Nay, Dad," Jane expostulated; "wi' them pale eyes, rit smulky nose an' sandy 'air? Nay, niver i' this wide world!"

Henry, when bluntly questioned by Benson, and more delicately by Jane, replied that he didn't know what he was, just plainly, any road. As far as his memory served him, his father had been a docker in Liverpool; his mother, he learned, had come from the Black Country. No, he had no brothers or sisters, and was glad of it. Had they any more questions, he asked, slightly on the defensive.

When Henry left, Benson gave it as his opinion that Jane was looking for trouble and was likely to find it.

Jane smiled, and stated that, whatever they said, Henry wasn't a bad chap, and she liked him well enough to marry him.

They were married. Henry took her away to the stilly little house with the privy in the yard, and Leeds saw her no more. Six months later her father died, and Henry went over to collect what furniture there was.

Returning, he starked it in the poky front room, deciding what they would keep and what had better be sold. With a stubby forefinger he pointed to the various pieces.

"Yon table's useful ; t'bedstead's nowt but old iron. T'bookcase 'ul be handy, so'll t'chairs. T'rest no it's nothing but ket--I'll get Davis ter gie me a price for the lot."

Jane never dreamed of protesting, and Henry banked the money.

Davis was born in 1905, Louis two years later, Mauricie not until they were established in the new semi-detached villa in Longland's Road.

When the war began, Jane made a last effort to discover how Henry made his money. It was obvious, even to her, that it was plentiful ; there were a dozen evidences to prove it. The boys had plenty of clothes - good ones too, made for them by a little tailor, not merely bought ready-made in one of the big shops. Henry dressed more smartly, and often hired a cab from the centre of the town to drive him home to dinner. Once or twice, when she hinted that she wanted new hems, stockings or a dress, Henry nodded and said, "Well, get whatcher want--why not?"

One evening she aoid nervously (because Jane was always slightly nervous of him), "Henry, Ah'd say you were doing pretty well, eh?"

Henry lowered the evening paper he was reading and replied, "Yer would, would yer?"

"Well, yer're doing well, aren't yer?"

"So-so. Better'n most, an' not so well as some."

"Henry"—she twisted her handkerchief in her fingers—“what do ye do—eggsactly?”

He chuckled. “*Anyone!* Nuy, don’t look that way”—for her face assumed an expression of distress—"that’s just my fun. Terday I bought bonts—hundreds of pairs. I’ll sell ‘em again tomorrow, wi’ luck. Profit of sevenpence-farthing a pair.”

“Eh! That’s not such a lot, is it, Henry?”

“On seven hundred pae?—why, I’d not know whatcher call a lot.”

“Are they good boots?”

He shrugged his narrow shoulders. “Never set eyes on ‘em; never want to.” Later he told her of cloth which he had bought, of scrap-iron, of water-bottles—all strange things to buy, thought Jane, a vision of thousands of bedecked rarales dancing before her eyes—then socks, and, most astonishing, several tons of washing soda. Henry seemed to buy and sell anything!

He was never unkind, he was merely impersonal and detached. He gave her more than sufficient money for the house. He praised—in his rather judging fashion—her cooking and the way in which she kept the house, but he never talked to her, never took her out anywhere with him. He was fond in the same queer way of his two sons. When they were doing their homework Henry would rise and stand behind their chairs, asking unexpected questions concerning their exercises.

With his forefinger he would jab at the page on which David was working out an arithmetical problem.

“Seven pints is sixty-three—yout’ve gnt sixty-fower?” Or, later, when the problems grew more difficult, he would make corrections regarding square yards, tons evnu poles and farlongs. To Louis he would say, “Look here— that ain’t spelt wi’ two ‘t’s, what’s the matter with you?” or, “Who taught you to spell success that style? Yer teacher ain’t no good.”

Even at eleven years old David was big. He promised to be tall and heavy; he was quick and accurate at figures, hard-working and attentive. His hair was fair, his eyes blue, his skin very pink and white. He enjoyed playing games and mixing with other boys of his own age.

Louis caused his mother to shake her head. He was a queer lad, moody and often difficult. Good looking, Jane admitted, but different from David. Nothing pink and white about Louis. His hair was dark, very fine and smooth, his skin ruddy but colorless, his eyes so deeply brown that in some lights they looked black. Although Jane found it difficult to understand him, she loved him dearly, and his affection for her, though but seldom demonstrated, amounted to a passion.

He could remember the day when his sister Marjorie had been born. He was only five, but he never forgot how a sense of oppression had hung over him when his mother did not appear at breakfast, when his father snarled at him, "Keep quiet, damn yer! Yer mother's bad!" and fear had been added to the oppression. He had screamed, hoping that his mother would hear him and order him to be sent to her room. His father rose, caught him by the shoulder, his fingers digging into the tender flesh.

"Hold that blasted cow," he ordered, "or, as there's a God, I'll kill yer!"

No one would explain to him what was the matter. The nurse said that if he were good there might be a lovely surprise for him later on. Louis hated her. Hated her starched apron, her cap and her air of hiding something from him. He wandered about all day, sniffing back tears at intervals, wretched, apprehensive and miserable, capable only of hating everyone who kept him away from his mother. David had been sent away to a neighbour's house for the day and had trotted off contentedly. Louis despised David for his willingness to do as he was told.

He sat on the stairs, chanting very softly, wiping away tears with the back of a grubby hand : "I 'ate ye nurse, I 'ate ye doctor, I 'ate ye cat on ye mat."

The doctor, coming downstairs, nearly fell over him, and said, "Bless my soul, what's this, what's this?"

Louis said, "It's me," then screamed : "Is my muvver dead?"

"S-sh ! Dead, no -no more dead than you are ! Be a good little fellow ; you shall see her presently—and your sister."

"I've not gorrer a sister, now !" He had exposed the lie.

Again that patronizing tone, "Oh yes—I brought her."

"Ven, take her back. Ve don't want her!"

Later he saw his sister, and Jane asked what they should call her.

Louis thought deeply, then said, "See-Saw, Marjwery Daw."

She was christened Marjorie.

To Henry his daughter seemed to be a miracle of beauty. The boys were well enough, but she was the light of his eyes. He worked harder than ever. She must have everything a child could want ; even her brothers must go to good schools so that they might be fit to associate with her. When David was thirteen, and Louis two years younger, they were sent to an expensive boarding-school. David cried when he departed, sniffing and clinging to his mother ; Louis, white-faced and shivering a little, said nothing, his 'good-bye' being curt and apparently lacking in affection or regret.

At school he was miserable until he discovered that he had more brains than most boys, and that he could make them believe anything he told them with sufficient assurance. He invented an uncle in the Secret Service, who wrote to him on cigarette-papers, giving him inside information about the army. "We're against the French

really," he told Bilston Minor. "That's why we almost allowed the Huns to get to Paris." Then, with a sudden change of expression, "Oh, damn, now I have let the cat out of the bag! Don't split, whatever you do, Bilston!"

Bilston said, "No fear, I shan't split. Tell me how you know?"

Louis shook his head. "Can't do that. I ought not to have told you so much . . ."

Bilston Minor told Bilston Major, who sent for Silver Minor and asked what the devil he'd been talking about. Louis stammered, blushed and spluttered, and half admitted that his uncle had been wrong to tell him, adding, "Only he gets lousy, repressed with not having anyone to talk to - I'm his favourite. The others scarcely know him." The touch of pathos, Louis felt, was good. Later, under oath of secrecy, the cigarette-paper was shown.

Bilston Major mentioned the affair in confidence to David, said how thrilling it must be to have such an uncle, and added that he could keep his mouth shut.

David tackled Louis, who shrugged his shoulders and said, "You don't know anything about him. Mind your own business."

"It's a damned lie; you deserve a thrashing!"

"Pouf, it doesn't hurt anyone. Ow! Let go my arm, you swine!"

"Swear that you'll drop it, then."

"All right--I'm sick of it, anyway."

He dropped it, but hinted to Bilston Minor that David had been a brute about it and made him stop talking through jealousy, because the mysterious uncle liked Louis better than he liked his elder nephew.

Bilston Minor said, "Oh, selfish and!"

Louis said, "You're right."

Cathcart stated one day that Jews were at the bottom of all the bother in the world. "I know," he said; "my gov'nor's in the City. He says a Jew lurks at the bottom

of every dirty transaction ; he says that at the back of every war a Jew hides ; he swears that in time—”*

Louis, speaking in a very high, thin voice, said, “Excuse me, Cathcart, I and my brother David are—Jews.”

Immediately he had spoken the words he wondered what on earth had made him voice them. He wasn’t a Jew ; at least, he had never heard that he was. His father didn’t look like one ; his mother certainly didn’t. They never went to church at all ; he’d never heard religion discussed at home. It had just struck him that, besides making Cathcart look uncomfortable to be told that the two Silvers were Jews, it would give him an opportunity to tell stories, embroider, and create a sensation. “Look at young Silver, he looks a Yid, doesn’t he ?”

Cathcart, a big, lumbering, good-natured fellow, gaped at him. “You—you and Silver Major—Jews ? What are you talking about ?”

Scarlet to the roots of his fair hair, David said, “It’s the first I’ve heard of it ! He’s probably lying ; he’s always lying.”

Cathcart looked at the red-faced David, and back at Louis, pale as always, but composed. He frowned, and considered.

“Well, anyway, I don’t believe it’s a thing a chap would boast about. And I don’t believe that he is lying. I’m sorry I said that, young Silver.”

For days Louis played at being a Jew, adopted attitudes which alternated between excessive humility and almost pride. The boys whispered, nudged each other, and were ready to account for any eccentricity in Louis’ behaviour by the statement, “He’s a Jew ! Cathcart says it was a damn’ fine thing to stand up and say so.” Louis grew tired of playing at being a Jew long before David lived down the stigma of not daring to admit that he was one.

Louis enjoyed himself. Boys were mostly fools, and he could score easily, make them believe anything. Even the fact that he was bad at games was accounted for because he said that his eyes focused wrongly. "It's a physical fact. Happens very rarely, but when it does—boy goes any chance of being good at games. I don't talk about it much, because I'm really so keen on games." He was anti-British for a time, and braved unpopularity with such firmness and apparent courage that they almost liked him for his support of foreigners. He listened to Rawley the head prefect explaining exactly why no decent fellow could admire the Huns, heard a mass of only partially digested evidence against them, one or two horrible tales of atrocities, then said, with apparent effort, "Thank you, Rawley. It was decent of you to explain. Yes I see now. I shan't make that mistake again. They're descended from Attila—and worthy children!"

Outside Rawley's study he grinned happily. It had been great fun, after all.

When they arrived home for the summer holidays their mother met them with Marjorie. What a lovely thing she was, Louis thought. The very sight of her filled him with love and adoration. Her fair hair was like spun silk, her eyes large and beautifully blue, and her skin soft, smooth, pink like the dog-roses and white like the sycamore which grew in the Head's garden at school.

Jane said, "Eh, yer've both growed, bless yer. Marjorie's growed an' all."

David said, "Hello, peach-face!"

Louis only stooped down and took her tiny hand in his.

"T'ear's waitin'," Jane told them, hustling about, growing excited and fussing over their luggage; she ordered porters here and porters there; in the end Louis dropped Marjorie's hand and went and saw to

everything himself. In his mind the words "T'car's waitin'" repeated themselves. A car! He hoped that it was a big one, really big, and of a good make. Better not to have one at all than have a "bag of hammers", like that of old Matson, the English master. The car was big, black and shining. A man wearing a peaked cap and a long linen coat sat at the wheel. Crikey!

Marjorie piped suddenly, "We've got a noo' house, we have!"

Her thin, shrill voice seemed to Louis like a stab from a very fine instrument. He felt that it induced in him a pain which was almost physical. It was like a violin note, so high and sweet that it was almost unbearable. He just stared at her, then her lips trembled into a smile, and she said, "You're my bruvver."

Jane said, slipping her arm more tightly round the child's body, "O' course he is, my sweet'cart. Both on 'em's yer brothers—say 'Davy'—say 'Louis'."

David didn't wait for Marjorie to reply; he said excitedly, "A new house! Not Longland's Road! Oh, is it a nice place, Mum? Where is it?"

Watching her face, Louis imagined for a moment that her smile was shadowed; somehow he didn't think that she was terribly pleased about the new house.

"Nice?" Jane repeated. "Why it's—it's—a palace, that's what it is. It's gotten gardlings, an' a billiard-room, eh, an' I dean't knaw what else. Oh, it's a marv'lous place, I tell yer."

That it was a splendid house Louis admitted. It had a carriage drive, turrets—a great many turrets, it seemed—stained-glass windows on the landings, and a great deal of white paint and bright red-and-blue Turkey carpets. It was called "Ladore".

David said, "I say, this is a house and a half, eh? Why's it called that?"

Louis, with Marjorie's hand once more in his, supplied the answer, "It's the name of a waterfall. You

know how they splash! Well this is a splash! See?"

"No, and I don't believe that you do either."

It was comfortable; there was no mistake about that. There were separate bedrooms for David and Louis, and even their own bathroom. There were nurseries for Marjorie, and dressing-rooms attached to the larger bedrooms. Servants kept appearing at intervals; there seemed to be a dozen of them. Their father, Jane told them, never came home until the evening. At midday he ate at the big hotel in the town, where he met his friends and did business.

She sighed, and said to Louis, "Eh, yer Dad's gotten on sommat wunn'erful. It fair beats me how he's done it, Lou P!"

"Aren't you jolly glad he has?"

"Navy, luv, I don't know as I am. It's funny I don't seem ter get used ter it. Servants 'maids' ye call 'em, not 'girls' like what we fuster say, is all over t' place. There's a gardener full-time chap, not just a jobber. I think oftimes we must be spendin' a fortune."

Louis wrinkled his fine nose, looking older than his twelve years, and stamping, hands deep in his pockets, he surveyed the room where they sat. He looked with distaste at the velvet-covered furniture, the hideously thick pile of the carpet, with its gaudy pattern of gold, pink and pale blue. He glanced at the shining brass fire-irons and elaborate fender, and, last of all, his eyes wandered to the pictures in their heavy gilt frames.

"One day," he said reflectively, as if he spoke his thoughts aloud, "one day I'll have a house for you, Mother."

Jane beamed at him. He meant it, bless him! Tamis 'ud never care if she dropped her 'g's and 'h's; Louis 'ud never care if she was worried by the multiplirity of servants, by the collection of knives and forks at every

meal, and the many rooms and bathrooms ; Loo always understood how she felt.

She said, "That's right, Loo, you and me and little Maigie. What 'ul it be like?"

"Like all the things that this place isn't," he said.

They no longer had high tea ; they had dinner, with David and Louis wearing their short black coats and striped trousers, and their patent-leather shoes. There was splendid food, and their father sat at the head of the table picking at breast of chicken and nibbling dry toast. He looked older, his pink skin had faded to yellow, his eyes were heavy and a little bloodshot. His clothes were new and very good ; Louis could see that. He wore a pearl pin in his tie, and his cuff-links were gold and heavy. He spoke with greater care, almost as if he were trying to drop his old slipshod method of speech.

"Yer grown, Davy. How yer getting on at school ? What's yer pet lesson ?"

David emptied his mouth of chicken and stuffing, nearly choked in swallowing so fast, and replied, "Yes, I've grown ; I'm as big as fellows three and four years older than I am. I'm getting on all right, thanks, Dad. I'm rather hot at maths., I think. They say so, anyway."

"I'll make yer an accountant, then yer can do my books." He chuckled. "They take a bit o' doing, I tell yer."

Louis laid down his knife and fork. "I've got too much, Mum ; can I leave it ?"

"Why, yes, if yer can't eat it, lovey. Tell yer Dudda how yer getting on at school, Loo." She hated to think that David was making an impression while Louis sat silent.

"Me ? Oh, I don't shine like David does. I'm just average."

David looked up from his plate. "He's an awful liar," he said.

Jane said, "Now, now, I'll have none o' that talk. Behave, Davy, speaking that road!"

Silver laid down his knife and fork, laughed and declared, "Then t'place for you is in t'business wi' me, young feller. I can do wi' a few good hours."

"I don't know that I'm so awfully good," Louis said modestly, and, to Jane's annoyance, his father shouted with laughing again.

Later, when David, sleepy after his heavy meal, had gone to bed, when Jane had trotted off to see if Majorie were really asleep, that the comforting night-light was burning and the window open just enough, but not sufficient to give the child cold, Louis was left with his father.

Silver, leaping in a big chair, looked less tired; some colour had returned to his face, his eyes were brighter and less heavy. He was talkative, and glad to have his son home. David might be the finee lad, but this queer, thin youngster listened attentively, passing comments which made you feel almost you were talking to a man, not to a small boy in an Eton collar.

"Fine house, eh, Lou?" Louis muddled. "Costs a devil of a lot to run. That doesn't matter - not a clam. Ever heard o' men being made o' money? Aye; well, I reckon as I've enoof brass ter make half a dozen men!" He stuck his thumb into the arm-holes of his waistcoat and extended his chest. "I can't do wrong, sev'nly. Everything I touch goes reit. Other chaps makes foolz of theirselves - not me! By God, not me; I'm on the reit side every time!"

"How do you do it, Dad? I mean how do you make money?"

His father slowly shut one eye and laid his forefinger along the side of his nose. The gesture was extraordinarily cunning; he looked like a fox, Louis thought.

"By keeping me eyes open; by having things as other chaps want, and being able to sell ter them - at a profit. By knowing as most folks 'ul buy aught if it's cheap

enough, no matter how bad it is. By seeing all and saying nowt. By knowing how ter bait wi' sprats so's I can catch mackerel. By knowing as most times men 'ul luke for faults in t'first dozen, then they get sick on it, and believe t'crit 'ul be t'same. It's the old idea of dressing a barrer. Put t'good 'uns ter the front, take what yer sell from t'back. That's t'road ter get money, Loo."

The small boy nodded. "I see." Then, after a moment's pause, "I say, Dad, are you a Jew?"

Henry Silver scratched his head. "Nay, Ah wish as I weer. I've oftentimes wished it. Gives yer a pull ter be a Jew. People's got inter their heads as Jews is smarter than most, more knowing, more likely ter get on. That's all ter the good for the Jew, see? Ever seen a conjurer, Loo? Ever watched how he starts a trick, and sort of—sets it on one side, as if he were leaving it ter simmer, like what cooks does wi' pans? Well, while it's—simmering, he does another trick, a easy little trick, maybe cracks a joke—does summat ter turn yer attention from what's happening ter the reely important trick. See? That's what folks does wi' Jews. They're that busy watching 'em do the little tricks that they turn their eyes off of the big tricks, an t'Jew gets away wi' them. He might lose on the small stuff—that's where all the fools is watrhing him—but he wins on the big stuff, because chaps have had their attention drawn away from it.

"People like sticking tickets on people: Mean as a Scot; close as a Yorkshireman; wild as a Irishman; silly Suffolkers; sharp Cockneys; clever, tricky Jews. That's how they go on. Nay, me father was a dock-side labourer, a gert drunken nowt. I can mind how he wuster come home an' lam inter us wi' his belt, buckle end nu' all. Me murther once said—that's yer grandma, Loo—as he were partly Swedish or Norwegian. Davy's going ter be like him—i' looks. S'pose young Margie 'ul be that type an' all. Yer different, Loo—God knows where yer get yer lukes from, Ah dean't."

"The boys at school," Louis said, "think that I'm a Jew." He did not think it necessary to explain to his father how this belief came to be held.

Henry laughed. "Let 'em go on thinking it, lad. It 'ul do you no harm when yer i' business wi' me. There, get along wi' you; time yer went i' bush!"

CHAPTER TWO

I

YEARS SUCCESSIVE, WHILE SCHOOL CONTINUED, WHILE LIFE flowed on in an even, slow-moving stream, lacking in incident, only whipped into a momentary disturbance by the winning of some cricket or football match by the school, or when some boy distinguished himself by gaining a scholarship for the Varsity. Louis always looked back on certain small incidents with a kind of grim amusement—a queer attitude of mind for a schoolboy. He remembered how it had got round that his father was rich, that they ran a huge car, kept dozens of servants, lived in an exceedingly large house and spent money like water. David hated the other boys knowing it; Louis did not mind in the least.

When Bilston said to David, "Is your father a profiteer?" David had flushed, clenched his fists and replied:

"My father is not! My father is a merchant, that's what he is."

When Bilston's young brother repeated the remark to Louis, he said: "God knows! I should think it's quite probable."

"I call that a caddish thing to say about your father!"

"Do you?" Louis' expression had been blandly surprised. "I don't see why. It's evident that everyone can't have lost money over the war, and people who do lose money always invent some silly ticket for the men who make it."

"But"—for Bilston Minor was persistent—"to profiteer means to get rich out of other people's misfortunes."

"Then the wrost profiteers are the undertakers," Louis had declared.

David worked hard, steadily, painstakingly. The Head said that he had a brilliant career before him, that his mathematics should carry him far. Louis worked in spasms, doing well in those subjects which interested him and lamentably badly in those which seemed to him boring or useless. Report after report complained, "He could do much better if he cared to do so."

Jane shook her head reprovingly, saying, "Nay, Lou, you did mightier work harder."

Henry Silver scowled, banged the report with his hand and demanded, "What if you think I send you to the damned place for? To catch butterflies or learn ter kick a ball about?"

"I don't belong to the bug-hunters," Louis said calmly, "and I've never wanted to kick a ball. I can't simulate an interest which I don't feel."

His sister, all gold coils, blue eyes and expensive frilled clothes, giggled admiringly. "Isn't Louis clever!"

Marjorie had a knack of dispelling anger, and her giggles were the sign that any ardentious argument was ended. Louis grunted at her; Henry Silver declared that Louis wasn't half so clever as he imagined himself to be, but the fury had gone from his voice, and Mum said gently, "Oh, yer must try ter do better, Lou dear," adding: "I'm certain yer will, won't yer?"

He was self-centred, and he knew it. He made no close friends, because to possess a close friend meant that you never had any time alone. You shared a study, you shared books, did each other's exercises and veras, even wore each other's clothes on occasion. Louis hated to move in a crowd; the idea of wandering about the countryside with the bug-hunters, of visiting old ruins with the archaeological society, of taking holidays abroad with some master and a dozen other boys, with all of whom you spent the major part of the year, appalled him.

'To David he was a mystery.

"But don't you want to go and see Venice, bathe on the Lido, and see gondolas and the Doge's Palace?" he asked.

Louis moved impatiently. "Of course I do! But I want to see those things in my own way, not in old Henderson's. I'd hate to be pointed out as 'English public-school boys'. I bet you all take your blazers!"

So while David went off to Italy in company with Henderson and ten other boys, Louis went to Cornwall with his mother and Marjorie. He persuaded Jane to go to a small place, to shun the luxury hotel which Henry had declared was the only decent place in the whole of the Duchy. They lived in a farmhouse, which had low rooms with windows looking over to the sea. They wore old clothes; Jane even ventured into the kitchen and gave the Farmer's wife her celebrated recipe for making pickled walnuts, while Louis wandered with Marjorie down to the seashore, swam, bathed, lay on the yellow sand, and told her impossibly romantic and exciting stories by the hour.

She was eleven; her golden hair had paled a little, and some of the roses had faded in her cheeks. Louis, watching her, sometimes felt a spasm of fear and wondered if she were delirious. He spoke of it to his mother, saying, "I say, Marjorie's not—well, I mean she's quite strong, isn't she?"

Jane looked up from the sewing she was doing, blinked her rather short-sighted eyes and said, "Oh, I think so, luv. She's been growing a bit over-fast, but Dr. Morrow says it's nothing that a good tonic and the sea air won't put right."

"Then you've had Morrow to see her?" He spoke so sharply that Jane started.

"Now, don't go on that road, Loo," Jane said soothingly. "Better to know what's wrong so's you can put it right. Good gracious, lad, anyone 'ud think as I didn't know how to look after my own bairn!"

He was penitent immediately. Funny, Jane reflected, how quickly he'd lose his impatience when he was with her or Marjorie. With his father or David he'd keep up an argument for hours, but never with her or his little sister. A better boy didn't live, kind and thoughtful as never was.

"I know, darling—only I'm just silly about Marjorie. She is such a sweet, isn't she?"

"Nay, don't worry about her, she's as right as rain." Jane paused, then the words came with a sudden rush. "It's *not* Marjorie as I'm worried over—it's *you*, Dad."

Louis sat down in a low chair near her, his long legs stretched out before him, his hand on her knee. When he spoke, his voice sounded singularly gentle. To Jane it was almost like a caress—in what she always imagined that a caress might have been, for Henry had never been lavish with them, and when he attempted to be in the least affectionate she felt that he despised himself for his weakness.

"Tell me," Louis said. "Tell me, Mother."

"Why, I'm far back," she admitted. "I never was a scholar, but I 'ear things sometimes. There's what's called a *slump* on, Lou. Nothing's paying, they say; people are failing right an' left."

He nodded. "I know 'ys?"

"I've thought sometimes that your Dad hooked—why I don't exactly know how ter put it pinched. That's it—pinched! As if things were difficult, an' yet we're spending more nor ever. There's the new car—Daimler it is, an' that's running into money. There's David gone off wi' his pocket full o' money; there's this an' that—oh, I don't know what ter mak' on it."

Louis laughed. "Probably, darling, that while other men lose money, Henry Silver makes it. You know the saying—'It's an ill wind'—well, there you are."

She shook her head. "Nay, Lou, winds have a nasty trick o' veerin' round."

II

Soft winds, golden sand, great white clouds sailing through the sky, the sea with its small, ineffectual waves which came so gallantly to the shore and then seemed to melt into nothing, and Marjorie's hand in his. Louis laughed for the sheer joy of living. Let David go and see Venice, wander about in palaces inhabited by ghosts and chattering tourists ; this was the better part.

Marjorie said, "You sound very happy, Louis."

"I'm here with you ; that's enough to make anyone happy."

She shook her curls. "You tease me, Louis!"

"We only tease people we love ; didn't you know that?"

"I didn't, but if you say so I'll believe you."

"That's right." He tugged her hair gently. "Remember what Louis says is always right."

She snuggled closer ; she felt like a beautiful friendly young animal, he thought.

"I always will," she said. "Is what David says always right too?"

"Good Lord, no!" He pretended to be both annoyed and hurt. "David, the poor fish, going to Italy, when he might have come here."

"I know a girl who has gone to Paris ; her name's Alicia Waldon. She's older'n me. She's gone there to school. Oh, Louis, she is so lovely ! Like snow and lilies." The child drew a deep breath at the recollection. "I wish she'd not gone ; I used to like to just sit and stare at her. Fancy, if one day you could marry Alicia Waldon, and I could live with you both. How lovely it would be ! - because you're the nicest-looking boy I know, and she's the loveliest girl. Louis, will you try to marry her?"

"I'll do anything to please you!"

As they walked back to the farm Louis thought, 'Being

with Marjorie makes me feel like God. She never doubts that I can do whatever I want. I wonder if it's not pretty bad for God to feel that way, or does it give you something to live up to? Our name—Alice—a kind of artificial name, though, not a real name at all. Jane is a real name—or is it that our Jane is such a real person? She is real—Dad's never quite real. I always feel that he's pretending, pretending to be confident, to be boisterously happy, or astonishingly astute. I suppose he *must* be confident and astute, but it never rings quite true to me. Whatever Jane says or does is true."

Their mother was waiting for them, standing at the door of the farmhouse, ready to wave as they turned the corner. She always called out the same words: "There you are! Tea's ready!"

Tra, and Marjorie chattering away about the crab she had seen and the shells she had found which were just like the nails on her own toes, and one as sharp as a razor with which she had played at shaving Louis.

Jane Silver listened mechanically, because her thoughts were running along other channels. She heard enough to answer suitably, "Yes, look at that!" or, "Fancy now, Lovey!" but her own ideas were really absorbing her. How wonderful it would be if she could live in a house like this farm, with, possibly, one country girl to help with the heavy work! "For I'm not so smart as I once was, with Louis and Marjorie and David, and"—her thoughts halted, then continued less evenly—"and Henry." She supposed that she would want Henry; if she didn't, then she ought to, for he'd been a good husband to her. He'd set her up in a fine house, provided her with money and good clothes, paid for servants to wait on her—and yet, somehow, Henry had never seemed like a husband. She never thought of the children as the result of Henry's lovemaking—if indeed you could call it lovemaking!—because the thought would have made her uncomfortable and almost ashamed.

She dreaded the time when the boys would leave school, and Henry, with that calm assumption that he could dictate to everyone, would decide the professions they should follow. David might be meek enough, would probably shrug his shoulders and agree that his father was right, and knew better than he did, but Louis—no, Jane couldn't see Louis accepting whatever his father dictated. Once or twice she had asked Louis what he thought he'd like to be. He had always made fun of her—said that he wanted to be a dustman, or a cornet-player, or something equally silly—but she suspected that Louis had very definite ideas, and, what was more, would stick to them. He might not have such good reports from school as had David, he scarcely ever brought home an important prize, but, in her heart, Jane knew that his were the better brains.

There had been the term when he had carried home a beautifully bound book, with the school arms on the cover. He had handed it to her and said, "Dearest Jane, read that and be bored to tears." The book was by Sir Walter Scott; historical, she gathered from the look of the names, for she never attempted to read it.

"Eh, Loo, what did you get this for?" she asked, smiling with pleasure.

"It's the poetry prize," he told her; "look inside for all particulars."

She read, *Louis Silver, Poetry Prize for an original poem on the Battle of Culloden Moor.*

"Well, was it good, Loo?"

"No, shocking, only the rest were worse."

"But I never knew as you wrote po'try——"

"Neither did I. I don't suppose that I shall again."

Another time it had been the chemistry prize, and yet during the term which followed Louis had gained marks which were palpably disgraceful.

"But last term you got the prize for this chemistry Loo," she expostulated.

"I know. I'm bored with it this term."

Yet again it was a certificate ; he had passed, with honours, some examination in music, but he never touched the piano at home, never suggested that he might continue to take music lessons.

A queer boy, Loo. David was far easier to understand. David was good, reliable and steady, but he didn't interest her as Loo did.

She forced her attention back to the tea-table, to Marjorie, who at Louis' instigation was spreading butter thickly on her bread, preparatory to larding it with raspberry jam and clotted cream.

"Nay," Jane said. "Nay, Margie love, not all three. You'll be as sick as a dog."

Louis laughed. "Not she ! She'd have experienced one of the most intense of human pleasures, and even if she's sick—which she won't be—it will have been worth it."

Marjorie smiled at him, adoration in her eyes, and asked, "Can I, Mother?"

"Well, if yer sick Loo can luke after you."

"I won't be—will I, Louis?"

Jane gave a sudden exclamation. "Oh, there's a telegraph lad gettin' off of his bike. Loo, see if it's for us. Eh, dear, I do 'ope as David's not come to any 'arm.'" Jane's aspirates went to pieces under the stress of any emotion.

Louis came back with the telegram. "Shall I open it?" He knew how she dreaded telegrams, and never laughed at her for it. Jane nodded.

As he read she watched his face, saw the life fade out of it, leaving it no paler than usual, but with a strange frozen quality of expression.

"It's David!" Jane said sharply.

Louis crumpled up the telegram and stuffed it into the pocket of his trousers. "No, it's not. It's Father. He's ill. We've got to go back."

"Yer father? Why, doesn't it say what's wrong? How ill? Loo, what does it say? Read it to me."

He made no attempt to withdraw the paper from his pocket; instead he kept his hand closed over it, and said, "It's from Bennison. It just says, *Mr. Silver very ill. Advise return immediately. Bennison.* That's what it says. Marjorie, go and begin to put your things into your little bag; I'll arrange for a car. We'll drive into town and see what we can do about catching a train. There may be one up to London, and we can go on in the morning. That's a darling, Marjorie, get on with your packing."

The little girl, her eyes wide and frightened, whispered back, "Yes, Louis, I will," and ran out of the room. Louis laid his hand on his mother's shoulder.

"He's dead," he said. "That's what Bennison says."

Jane stared back at him. "Dead?" she repeated. "'Enry dead? What of, Loo?"

Louis shivered suddenly. "He doesn't say. . . ."

III

"Then it was suicide?" Louis asked.

Bennison, the sharp-faced solicitor, who had been nothing and nobody until Henry Silver placed his affairs in his hands, paid him well and set him on his feet, twisted his mouth, and nodded, adding hastily, "While of an unsound mind, of course. That's what they'll bring it in at the inquest."

"Where is he?"

"At the mortuary. I shouldn't let your mother go down if I were you. It's not a nice sight for a woman."

Louis said coldly, "I'll look after my mother, Mr. Bennison."

"Looks to me as if you'll have to—things are in a pretty mess."

The boy's eyes narrowed. "What—money?"
"Or the lack of it."

Louis saw to everything. He interviewed Bennison again and again. That was exactly what the solicitor felt had happened. Louis entered the office a slim, dark-haired boy, with narrowed eyes and a jaw-line which showed white in his tanned face. Instead of being confused and stumbling over his requests he made Bennison feel that he took charge. He put forward awkward questions, asking to see this ledger and that account until Abraham Bennison would have willingly flung him down the steep stairs which led from the office. Henry Silver had been bad enough, but Henry Silver had paid well. This brat of sixteen wouldn't pay a penny—for the good reason there were no pence with which to pay.

His brother David—nice boy, fair-haired and round-faced—was a different proposition. He accepted the fact that Bennison knew and he didn't. Louis snarled that if Bennison knew he wanted to know as well! Unpleasant lad, impudent and a damned sight too smart.

"Then the house must go—Ladore?" Louis asked.

It gave Bennison some slight satisfaction to reply, "Virtually, the house has gone already—with it the furniture, pictures, carpets, fittings—"

"All right, we'll take that as read. And Longland's Road?"

"That's your mother's. Your father made it over to her some years ago. Unless she likes to let it go to help pay off some of the debts. It would create a good impression.

David said eagerly, "Yes, of course—"

Louis scowled. "What do we want to make good impressions for? It's hers—she'll stick to it, and rightly." Then, speaking directly to the solicitor, he asked, "How did things get into this mess?"

Bennison twirled a paper-cutter in his fingers. "Buy-

ing and selling non-existent goods, chiefly. It began with selling crates of fruit that had never been grown, and went on to selling property and land that never materialized, only happened in your late father's fertile imagination."

Louis snarled, "I thought that you were his legal adviser—"

"Damn it!" Bennison was stung into retort, and blamed himself for the weakness in discussing matters with a dirty little bastard of sixteen. "Damn it, he didn't tell me everything! How could I know what dirty games he was playing?"

The boy rose, stood with his hands in his pockets, his mouth sneering, his eyes cold and insolent. Bennison's hands itched to smack his arrogant face. "I should have thought that you might have both known—and understood."

"You can't say things like that, Louis!" David exclaimed. "Mr. Bennison was Dad's adviser and—"

Contemptuously Louis ejaculated, "Oh, shut up!" Then, turning back to Bennison, he said, "You're a Jew, aren't you?"

"Who said so?" He hated people to know that he was a Jew, that his real name was—or had been until he had changed it—Benjamen.

Louis, turning to the door, jerked his head towards David, indicating that he should follow. "Oh, one Jew always recognizes another," he said easily. "That's something you didn't know, did you?"

"Silver wasn't a Jew—"

"No? There are still some things that you don't know." He paused. "And I do." Outside, David, flushed and angry, said, "What's that rubbish about being a Jew? We're not Jews. Dad's father was a dock-hand in Liverpool. I wish you'd drop all that play-acting, Louis. It looks to me as if we shall want all the friends we can get; there's no need to antagonize people as you've

been doing. Dad trusted Bennison; I've never heard anyone say anything against him. Why assume that high-handed style? We can't afford to be high-handed."

"We can't afford to be anything else."

"You do think you're clever, don't you?"

"No—I never *only think*—I *know* that I am."

"I'm the eldest son, anyway. I ought to do the talking, not you."

"Then do it," Louis said smoothly; "do it, my clever brother."

Jane had been stunned. They had not allowed her to see Henry; not that she wished to particularly. He was dead, and she realized of what small importance he had been in her life. He had earned money, demanded meals, attention, and the right to share her bed; he had been generous in an easy, impersonal kind of way, but he had never really entered into her life or wished her to enter his. It appeared that Henry had earned a great deal of money, spent large sums, and then suddenly lost it all. How he had lost it Jane did not know, but then she had never understood how Henry came to make so much in the first place, and he had never discussed it with her.

Henry was dead, killed by his own hand. She wondered how, and asked Louis, who replied that the ways and means didn't matter, and she must put the whole wretched business out of her head.

Louis was so good these days. David had railed against leaving school, had declared that it was terrible that he could not go to Cambridge, and that his career was ruined. Louis said nothing, merely accepted the fact that he must leave school and at sixteen begin to work. He seemed to understand exactly how to manage everything, and, frowning and intent, sat for hours doing involved accounts. One evening, when Jane sat with her two sons in the drawing-room which very soon would not belong to them any more, Louis summed up the whole situation for her.

"Longland's Road house is yours," Louis said.
"Father made it over to you many years ago, it appears."

"Why, yes, I mind signing some paper or other. 'E always took the rent. But it's empty now, Loo."

He nodded. "A jolly good thing, because we're going to live there."

David burst out excitedly, "Think of it! That poky house, with no garden; just a beastly back yard. Isn't the whole thing damnable? Just because Father played the fool, gambled and lost his head, we're all landed into this mess. Where's my career? Where's any chance to get on? It's no use; I can't help feeling—"

"You can help talking," Louis said. "Keep quiet. We're all in the same boat! With your maths and figures, Bennison will give you a job. I'm the difficulty. I can't do anything—yet. Now, to get back to the present position, Mother. Listen and attend; don't pretend that you can't understand, because it's well known that your brain-power is exceptional. Now, then. . . ."

They left "Ladore", taking with them only such furniture as was allowed by the creditors: small, cheap pieces of furniture which Henry Silver had long since banished to the servants' quarters, but it was surprising how many small articles of considerable value found their way to the little house in Longland's Road, transported thither by Louis. David watched him going through the contents of cabinets, cutlery canteens, and plate-cases, his eyes appraising and keen. At intervals his fingers closed on some silver article, some piece of good plate, or an enamelled snuff-box—for Henry had had a mania for buying small and expensive *objets d'art* from impoverished aristocrats, rubbing his hands and declaring that they were fools not to know the real value.

"It's all wrong," David declared. "This picking up this or that, sneaking off with it because no inventory's

been made yet. It's thieving—that's what it is. I hate it!"

"All right"—very coolly—"don't watch me."

"I tell you it's stealing. It's breaking the confidence that the creditors have placed in us."

"All right, I tell you. Go and bring the police."

"I wonder what Mum would say, or Marjorie, if they knew that you were nicking stuff?"

Louis swung round, his face distorted with rage; he rushed at his brother, caught him by the lapels of his coat and shook him violently.

"By God, if you dare to tell either of them I'll—I'll kill you! I swear that I will. I'm doing this on my own. It's my business, and I'll trouble you to mind yours. Now get out!"

David, half frightened, half distressed, left him. Nothing would have induced David Silver to have struck his brother. He was by far the stronger of the two, and he knew it, but it was not in his nature to take advantage of the fact. He could not condone Louis' actions, he could not understand Louis' attitude of mind; his brother was a mystery to him. Miserably, he got his hat and went down to ask Bennison for a job in the dusty, even rather dirty offices of the firm—Bennison, Givens and Bennison.

Louis continued his careful, methodical inspection of everything of value, debating which might be safely removed without causing comment, transferring his gains to Longland's Road, where, in the bedroom which was to be his, he hid them neatly under a loose floor-board and returned to "Ladore".

'If we can't have a banking account,' he mused, 'then we must keep our capital in the house. It's going to be difficult—damned difficult. David, as a clerk, may get thirty bob. God knows what I shall get—more than is on my pay sheet or pay packet, I'll swear. Marjorie's got to go to school, and not a council school, either. I won't

have her learning to talk like Dad did, nor even as Mother does. It's too big a handicap. Marjorie's going to be lovely, and she must have a chance to marry decently. She's got to have nice clothes, and holidays at the sea, and medicines for that cough. Whatever happens, I won't let her feel the pinch.

'Longland's Road isn't any use as a property. The locality's gone down since Father bought it, so we might as well live there. Otherwise we could have done with something smaller. Jane 'ul pull her weight; I can trust her. Jane's a real person, even though she's got no ambition. I've got ambition, but I'd never blame anyone for not trusting me—not until I've made myself safe, at all events. That won't be for some years, I know. Fortunes don't drop out of the sky; they've got to be fought for, sweated for—earned, if they're worth anything. Father was all right so long as he worked, until money seemed to tumble in from nowhere. Then he got careless—and greedy.' He grinned, looking for a second like some handsome imp. 'I'm greedy, but no one shall ever say that I was careless.'

CHAPTER THREE

I

BENNISON GAVE DAVID A CLERKSHIP AT THIRTY SHILLINGS a week. David was grateful and spoke highly of Bennison's kindness. Louis asked if the salary was what Bennison offered or what David demanded.

"It's what he offered, and, if you ask me, I think it's pretty good."

"If he offered thirty you ought to have known that you're worth thirty-five."

David grunted. "Oh, that's so like you, Louis."

Louis himself discovered that work was difficult to find. At the age of sixteen he was too young to be given responsibility, and yet he was too old to be used as a mere errand-boy. For several weeks he tramped about slowly losing heart, but always contriving to concoct some amusing story to relate to his mother and Marjorie in the evening.

Marjorie was perfectly happy. She liked living at home in preference to a boarding-school, she loved her mother's cooking, and, most of all, it was such fun living under the same roof as her brothers. The girls at the day-school where Louis had taken her were friendly, ready to admire her golden hair, and to sympathize with her because she had lost her father and—what seemed more important—a splendid home.

"It can't be very nice," said Muriel Atkinson, "to live in Longland's Road after 'Ladore'. My mother says that 'Ladore' is the finest house in Melbrough."

"Not nearly so nice as Longland's Road," Marjorie averred stoutly. "It's a lovely house, and my brother David's brought me home a yellow kitten."

The small girls looked at one another in silence, then Muriel Atkinson breathed softly, "Oh, isn't she—brave?"

Marjorie was regarded as a heroine, and each time she told stories of her yellow kitten, of her mother's cakes and puddings, or how Louis had promised to make the back yard into a little garden for her, they accepted these remarks as tokens of her courage in the face of adversity. She might have made capital out of their admiration ; instead, shaking her curls so that they swung backwards and forwards, she protested that she was unbelievably happy.

The children adored her, brought her little presents, and begged for the privilege of walking home with her after school. Jane shook her head, and confided to Louis, "Nay, I doubt as they'll spoil that bairn," to which he replied confidently, "Not a bit, Jane dear. It would take more than a crowd of kids to do that."

Summer passed ; autumn was merging into winter when Louis found work. During the workless weeks and months he had, from time to time, sold some of the things which he had taken from "Ladore", never disposing of them in Melbrough itself, but walking to one of the near-by towns where he was less likely to be recognized. Even the pawnbrokers and jewellers found that the thin boy, with dark eyes and slim, fine hands, drove a hard bargain. One jeweller offered him work, on commission, selling watches and collecting the weekly instalments.

Louis refused, and, when asked why, answered that the work held out no prospects and that it would cost him too much in boot-leather.

Then James Carnster wanted an office-boy. Louis, chancing to pass as the senior clerk stuck the notice in the window with strips of gummed paper, walked in and got the job.

Carnster, a gaunt Scotsman, who dealt in wholesale paper and stationery, looked him up and down.

"What kind o' an education ha'e ye had?"

Louis said, "Sufficiently good, I think."

Camster's eyes twinkled. "Sufficiently good for—what?"

"To lick stamps and keep the letter-book."

"Wha' about the petty cash?"

"Does the office-boy keep that?" His voice was very calm and unmoved.

"No, as a matter o' fact."

"I thought not. Your question meant, then—was I honest?"

Camster chuckled softly; the boy might be impudent, but he had his wits about him. "Something like that, aye. Are ye?"

"Sufficiently to know that penny stamps and odd sixpences aren't worth the risk."

This time the chuckle was louder. "Wad ye tak' a thousand pound?"

"I can't say; no one has ever given me the opportunity, sir."

He got the situation, at fifteen shillings a week. It wasn't hard work, although it was dull, profitless, but he knew that his mother was spending what small amounts she had realized on the sale of those pieces of Jewellery which Henry Silver's creditors had been unable to take from her.

Jane was looking pinched these days; she was thinner, and sometimes when Louis watched her going upstairs he felt that she literally pulled herself up by the balusters. Those were the times when he knew that his heart contracted, that his fists clenched, and he felt more than ever determined to make headway.

Camster liked him, enjoyed sending him errands, yet counted his change very carefully when Louis executed any small commission for him.

"What did I gi'e you? Three shillings—hello, a ha'penny short—no, no, it's right! Ye've contrived to be honest this time, Silver."

Under his shaggy ginger eyebrows he would shoot a quick glance at the boy, hoping to see that he had changed colour, showed some sign of embarrassment or annoyance. He never saw the slightest change ; Louis' face remained impassive. Once, when the change amounted to one half-penny, he pushed it back to the boy, saying, "I'll gi'e you that for yourself."

Louis picked it up and slipped it into his pocket. Camster laughed.

"I thought you said that ha'pennies were no' worth takin' ?"

"Worth accepting," Louis corrected ; "not worth taking when they don't belong to me."

Christmas came ; David talked about the presents he was going to buy for his mother and Marjorie. Louis listened and said nothing. True, he might sell a couple of silver spoons, but he felt that those things must be kept for emergencies. He had sold some of them when he was without work, in order to keep the family budget going, but for presents . . . no, he couldn't. Jane might be ill, he might get out of work again. He folded his lips into a thin line and listened to David.

"I've saved half a crown a week," David said, his face wreathed in smiles. "I've done that for eight weeks now. A pound ! I wonder what they'd like ?"

A pound—twenty whole shillings ; it was more than Louis' wages. He kept back only two shillings a week ; you couldn't save much out of that. For the first time he felt wretched and disheartened. What was the use of pinching and scraping—never having any fun ? Life was plain hell.

II

Camster was giving away Christmas presents. The treasury notes lay at his side, and he gave them away as he personally wished each member of his staff a Merry

Christmas. Louis carried in a letter which had come by hand. Camster, reading the letter, mechanically picked up a note without looking at it and said, "Christmas box, Silver. Merry Christmas to ye."

Louis slipped it into his pocket and, after making his thanks, went back to the office. A pound! He could equal David in his presents.

Little Fleming, the junior clerk, asked, "Get your Christmas box?"

Louis nodded.

"So did I," Fleming said, "when I went in with the letters. Ten bob. Always gives the same. Ten bob to the juniors, pound to the seniors. It'll buy my young lady a pair of gloves, anyway."

"Same here," Louis said; "I mean the ten bob, not the young lady or the gloves. I say, Fleming, want your cup of cocoa?"

Fleming glanced at the clock. He always had a cup of cocoa at eleven; said that his young lady was a "great believer in cocoa; says it's the fats in it do you good. She'd like to see me put on weight, y'see". He pursed his lips. "It's a bit early—still, if you're wanting a job—that's all right. Slip and get it, Silver. Don't slop it in the saucer, mind." He handed Louis the usual threepence and added, "Hot, not half cold, remember."

In the little tea-shop next door to the office Louis asked for the cocoa and proffered his three coppers, then said, "Oh, could you be so kind as to give me two ten-shilling notes for a pound?"

With one note in the pocket of his waistcoat, the other in his trouser pocket, he went back to the office, bearing Fleming's cup carefully so that the sandy brown liquid should not spill and endanger Fleming's trouser-knees as he drank it—which he did with both noise and appreciation.

A few moments later Camster passed through the office on his way to luncheon. He stopped at the desk

where Louis was munching a sandwich and said, "Oh, Silver, did I gi'e ye a p'und note in mistake?"

Louis hastily put down his sandwich and sprang to his feet. "No, sir—ten shillings."

Camster's keen, close-set eyes watched him intently. "Yer surc?"

"Indeed, yes, sir." Louis' hand went to his pocket and pulled out its contents. A crumpled ten-shilling note, sixpence and some coppers. "There it is, sir."

"Verry weel. I suppose that I ought tae apologize, eh?"

"No, sir—rather not—of course not."

He had no feeling that he had done wrong. If people were such fools as to hand you pound notes when they intended to give you half that amount, they were to blame. Camster had picked up the note, handed it to him with a 'There you are'—that was the end of it. As he walked home Louis carefully smoothed out the two ten-shilling notes, whistled cheerfully as he thought of what he would buy, and dismissed from his mind any question regarding the rights of the matter. Marjorie should have her dancing-slippers, his mother should have the warm-lined gloves she needed, and David—not really a bad chap—should get a couple of packets of the cigarettes he liked. Everything had worked out wonderfully well.

Christmas passed, and all Louis' dissatisfaction returned. He hated his work, which was mechanical and needed no particular exercise of intelligence. He saw himself tied for ever to a desk in Camster's office, slowly working his way up from office boy to junior clerk, and on—with luck—to a head clerkship. What did all that amount to? Nothing—at best three or four pounds a week, and to get to that salary meant years of dull, drab monotony. His clothes were growing shabby; more, he himself was growing too tall for them. His wrists and ankles jutted from sleeves and trouser-legs. Whenever he caught sight of himself he set his teeth and vowed that

one day he would have all the clothes for which he longed.

But how? He was nearly seventeen, and still an office boy at fifteen shillings a week! On Saturdays, when David handed over his twenty-five shillings, and Louis pushed forward his pay-packet, from which he had extracted the two shillings to pay for his midday sandwich, he was acutely conscious of how much more David contributed to the household expenses; twice as much.

Jane always smiled, kissed them both and said, "Nay, I don't know what I'd do wi'out my two good boys, I'm sure."

She treated them exactly the same. David received no more consideration than Louis; she loved them both. It was not that David ever hinted that he might be regarded as the prop and stay of the house; give him his due, he was too essentially kindly; that even Louis admitted. David never suggested that he did more than Louis, never gave the matter a thought. He was doing his best, and knew that Louis was doing the same. It was only to Louis that the position was intolerable. Each week, at the sight of David's weekly contribution, Louis' face flamed, and, more than once, Jane saw his hands clench, and realized how deeply he suffered. Marjorie noticed it too, and when Louis walked out of the room she would hurry after him, follow him up to the room which he shared with David, chattering about her school, her friends, her lessons, until she saw that the hard, set expression had faded and he could smile again.

Again and again he repeated, "I must get out. I will get out," but no opportunity seemed to offer, although he sought regularly through the advertisements in the papers at the free library. He wrote countless letters in answer to the advertisements, which he delivered by hand to their various destinations in the town because he could not afford the necessary stamps. He never received

replies, and his hopes almost died. He grew moody, irritable and painfully thin. He but rarely spoke, and sat staring gloomily in front of him, his brain twisting and turning, trying to formulate some plan by which he might begin to earn money.

His mother said, "Nay, Leo, don't worrit, lad. Summat good is certain to turn up."

"Of course it will." Marjorie smiled, watching her beloved Louis with anxious blue eyes. "It must; Louis's so clever; someone must realize what a catch it would be to have him working for them."

"Of course," her mother agreed. "It's just a question of being patient."

More than once Louis speculated as to what he could make out of the petty cash if he evolved some scheme for taking so much every week, and possibly entering non-existent letters into the letter-book. He decided that the game would not be worth the candle. At most he could not make more than five shillings a week. That would get him nowhere. Once, taking money to the bank, he weighed the packet in his hand, speculating as to whether it would be worth while running away and disappearing for a time until the hue and cry died down. The paying-in book read, "£921 4s. 8d."

It might be a start, a flying start, but the handicap was too great. When Louis Silver appropriated money that was not his, money which, if taken, would bring him within the power of the law, it would have to be something more than a paltry three hundred pounds. Either his thieving must be dead safe or the risks must be worth while.

He had no moral scruples whatever; his only thought was, 'I can't risk danger for something that's not worth it in solid cash or opportunities.'

One morning Camster sent for him, and pushed a letter across the desk.

"I want ye to tak' this tae the Grand Hotel. It's for Fosdick—Albert Fosdick. D'you know him?"

Know him! Everyone in Melbrough knew Fosdick; everyone referred to him as "Bert" Fosdick. In his own estimation he was the fruit king of the north, with a huge import trade, with cargoes of bananas coming in to him from Jamaica and the Indies. As a matter of fact, "Bert" Fosdick was a small wholesaler, with big ideas, particularly of his own importance. He was a man of little education, shrewd and fairly crafty. In addition to his fruit business he ran a successful street-corner bookmaking business. Men said that Fosdick didn't get rich on the fruit he sold, but on the sixpences and threepenny bits of the working men. He was loud-voiced, ostentatious and essentially vulgar. He lunched every day at the Grand Hotel, nodding with a certain amount of patronage to men he scarcely knew, scraping acquaintance with men who were his superiors, both socially and in business, assuming with them an air of being "hail-fellow-well-met", which could, on occasion, be particularly trying.

Again and again Louis had seen his massive figure, clad in over-loud tweeds, his bullet-shaped head topped by a hat too light in colour and too curly as to brim, and wondered what kind of a man "Bert" Fosdick might be.

"Yes, I know him," he said. "Is there a reply?"

"Aye, an' see that he writes it whiles ye wait. It's pressing."

Louis had no difficulty in finding Fosdick. He stood among a little crowd of men, his hat tilted back, showing his scarlet face and wide gash of a mouth. His voice rolled and rumbled, interrupted at intervals by a great shout of noisy laughter. Louis waited for a lull in the conversation, then went forward and offered his note.

"Mr. Camster sent this, sir. Might I have an answer?"

"Camster? Who the hell is Camster? O-oh! You mean 'Scottie' Camster. Him, eh? All right, wait there, I'll attend to it in a minute." He turned back to the other men. "So—as I was telling you, this

chap came home very late, and found his wife in bed, and . . ."

The heavy voice sank to a whisper and the rest was unintelligible. Louis waited for the burst of laughter which he knew would follow the softly spoken sentences. It came, a shout which filled the ornate lounge with a shattering, unmusical sound.

Fosdick said, "That's a good 'un, eh? No, Jimmie," to the bar-tender, "that round's on me, so's the next. Now, lads—just another for the road."

Louis, seated in a corner, watched the money paid over the counter. Half-crowns, sixpences and shillings. As much as his week's salary, and all going to buy drinks, stuff to pour down men's throats, to waste! He looked at their red, hot faces, at their laundered collars, their rich silk ties and scarf-pins, their well-tailored suits and smart boots. They were rich; compared with himself they were millionaires, and they spent their time lounging in a bar, spending money on drinks, listening to bawdy stories.

The group was breaking up. The men were shouting to each other that they'd meet again later on. "Make it six—what, here? Yes, have a chop with me?"

"Coming on to the dogs?"

"Might do. Harry, what about meeting here first? Have one and then get a chop."

"I shall have my car; will you have yours, Bert?"

"Bettcher life! You and I can take the whole crowd!"

"Right, here at six to prounce one——"

"Or two——"

"Or half a dozen."

Fosdick turned, stared round him, caught sight of Louis, and came over to him. His eyes were blurred. Louis thought that he was probably more drunk than he realized.

He said, "You're from Camster's, eh? Where's the

ruddy letter? I' my pocket—yes? I'll write an answer. . . ."

He swayed over to a writing-table, sat down to write, then got up again, cursing his thick coat. "Damn'a thing! Can't write wrapped i' this blanket."

He slipped it off and slung it carelessly on the back of a sofa, from which it slid to the floor. Louis picked it up, and shot a glance at its owner. He was crouched over the writing-table, his big face scarlet, scowling and reading the letter from Camster. He was completely absorbed, and muttered the words as he read them. Louis sat down on the sofa, his eyes on Fosdick, his foot slowly and carefully pushing a large wallet under the sofa. As the coat slid down it had fallen from the inner pocket; he had seen it when he picked up the coat. In a moment it had disappeared, safely hidden. A second later Louis' shabby cap, propelled by his toe, joined it.

Fosdick said, "Here, where're you, boy?"

"Here, sir." Louis was at his side.

"Take this to Camster. Say that's my last word. See? No good trying to monkey about wi' Bert Fosdick. Know that? Know it's no use trying to monkey about wi' me? Here's half a crown f'you. Smart boy—what-scher name? Silver? Not Henry Silver's son? Yer father was too damn' smart—be content wi' being just—smart. See if my car's there, will you?"

The car was waiting. Fosdick lumbered out, and Louis, after looking round vaguely, said to the hall porter, "Oh, I've left my cap in the writing-room. May I go back and get it?"

"Why, o' course; look slippy for fear someone pinches it."

"No one's likely to. It's too old to be worth anything."

He stooped, raked under the sofa, found the cap and the wallet, then, covering the wallet with his cap, he drew it out. Another quick look round and it was trans-

fferred to his breast-pocket. With a "Thanks, I found it" to the porter, Louis Silver walked out.

Camster's closed at five, and at five-twenty anyone passing over the patch of waste land at the end of Longland's Road might have seen Louis Silver, intent and absorbed, bending over a large puddle. Later he walked into the house, holding in his hand a muddy wallet of crocodile leather, with gold corners.

Marjorie said, "Louis, what have you got there?"

He smiled. Jane thought it was the first time she had seen him really smile for weeks. "I believe that it's my fortune," he said. "I found it lying in the gutter outside the Grand Hotel. Look"—he flicked it open and showed them the visiting-card inserted behind a talc slip. "It belongs to Bert Fosdick, and I'm taking it back to him."

Jane said, "Oh, Leo, didn't you oughter take it to the p'lice?"

He grinned. "I don't know what I ought to do; I know what I'm going to do."

Fosdick's house was of the same type as "Ladore", large, ugly, comfortable and ostentatious. A car stood at the door, smooth and shining as Louis remembered his father's car used to look. He rang, and the door was opened by a maid who was less smart than the appearance of the house warranted. Louis, watching her, noting everything, decided that the place was badly run, that probably Fosdick was familiar with his servants, and incapable of controlling them properly. The hall looked dusty, the flowers in a tall vase were wilting for lack of water, a small tray holding a cup and saucer with some tea-dregs at the bottom stood on a table.

The maid said, "Can't you give me a message? 'E don't like being bothered for nothink.'"

"It's not—for nothing," Louis assured her. "Please tell him that Louis Silver is here. He'll remember me, I think."

She flounced her skirts as she turned. "Orlrite, only don't blame me if 'e's ratty, will you?"

Fosdick came lumbering downstairs a few moments later. His waistcoat was unbuttoned, his tie hanging loose; obviously he had been asleep. Louis thought, 'Getting sober to enjoy getting drunk again.'

He said, "Whatcher want, for God's sake?"

Louis held out the mud-stained wallet. "To give you this. You must have dropped it when you got into your car at the 'Grand'. I came out a minute after you and saw it lying in the gutter. It had your name inside, so I brought it."

The big, gross man stared at the wallet, blinked his eyes and said, "Oh, you did, did you? What for didn't you take it to the police?"

Louis looked uneasy and confused, then said with a burst of frankness, "Well, sir—somehow I thought you might not like half the police force handling your private wallet. That's why I brought it myself."

Fosdick's thick fingers were examining the contents eagerly. Once his lips were pursed as if he were going to whistle. The examination over, he passed his big, swollen hand over his lips. Turning, he jerked his head towards a door.

"I'm going to have one. Come along—have one too, eh?"

"Thank you, sir."

The dining-room might have been the twin of the old one at "Ladore". Louis saw the same kind of carpet, the same oil-paintings in their wide gilt frames, the same heavily upholstered furniture, the same massive sideboard holding a tantalus, decanters and several large cruetts. Fosdick seized a decanter and, holding it out to Louis, said, "Port, eh? I dunno if there's any cake. If you want some, slip along to the kitchen and tell 'em I say you're to have some. They eat cake all day, I'll swear. Never touch it myself. . . . What, no cake? All right. Just shove that siphon over here."

Holding his glass, containing the darkest whisky-and-soda Louis had ever seen, he lowered himself into an arm-chair, and, nodding towards another, he said, "Siddown."

For some moments he occupied himself with his glass, then, setting it down on a table at his elbow, he spoke.

"So you found it outside the 'Grand', eh. Have a look inside it?"

"No," Louis said; "I wasn't particularly interested."

"Know how much money there was in it?"

"I have no idea."

Fosdick chuckled. "S'pose you think that makes you sound bloody honest?"

"No, it makes it quite clear that I wanted from you something more valuable than what might have been in the wallet. That's what it means."

"Want something? What the devil d'you want? A fiver?"

"A job—with you."

"Street-corner work?"

"The fruit trade. Will you take me on, Mr. Fosdick? I could be useful, I'm certain of that. I'm quite smart at figures; I could probably save you money. You're out a lot—that's evident. I'd look after your interests, and I could do it. I'm nearly seventeen. I had a decent education. Learned to speak properly and—"

Fosdick said, "I never did, never shall. Pour me out another drink. I'm in-ter-ested. I might do worse. In yer spare time you might try to drill these bitches of servants of mine! Let o' dirty fly-bi-nights; it's my belief that they rob me right an' left. When could you start at my place? Always supposing"—his eyes narrowing suddenly—"as Camster gives you a good reference. Mind, I'm paying no fancy salaries—you don't know anything about the business. Got to learn, and when lads are learning they're a pain in the neck ter everyone."

Louis finished his port. He realized that for some obscure reason this gross, coarse fellow was dissatisfied

with many things ; more, that, in spite of his sneers about the contents of the wallet, the fact that Louis had brought it back personally, had not even hinted at a reward, and that he had not examined the papers which it contained, had impressed Fosdick. He had intended that this should be the reaction ; he had played for it, and the Fates had been on his side.

"I could come a week from today," Louis said. "I want two pounds a week."

"Two pounds a week ! Gorblimy, I can get a manager for that!"

Louis smiled ; he had won and he knew it. "That's what you'll be able to make me before long."

"Two pounds a week—well, if you do the books—I might—"

"I want another pound if I do the books."

"Yer can go on wanting. Anyway, I've got a book-keeper already. Nice girl."

Louis stood up. "I mustn't keep you, sir. I know you're going to watch the dogs, and your friends will be waiting for you at the 'Grand'—"

Fosdick scrambled out of his chair. "Lord help us—I'd clean forgot all about it. Gad, you've got a memory ! Only heard that in the bar this morning, didn't yer ? Me, and Chuck Baines, and Lenny Good, un'—who else was there ? Oh, Dr. Felling. May have been one or two others. I was a bit tight. I'll drive you down the town if you like, Silver. C'me on. I mustn't keep the lads waiting ; they never get prop'lly going until old Bert gets among them."

Louis climbed into the car, Fosdick lurched in after him. Louis thought that he was the most clumsy man he had ever seen, and in his efforts to move quickly he puffed and blew like the proverbial grampus.

Louis said, when they reached the nearest point to Longland's Road, "Thank you very much. This is fine for me. Good night."

"Here—half a mo'. You'll come to me in a week's time—an' do the book-keepin'—two quid."

Louis smiled, "Three with the hooks—"

"All right, three, blast you. I say, what about a reward?—oh, you'd better have one, makes it legal or suthink." Again the fat, stiff fingers fumbled in the wallet; he passed Louis a piece of paper which crackled. "Goo' night—tomorrow week, eh?"

CHAPTER FOUR

I

Louis LIKED FOSDICK'S BUT VERY LITTLE BETTER THAN he had liked Clamster's, except that he now earned more money, had a certain amount of authority, and felt that he was at last finding some outlet for his intelligence.

The warehouse in which the office was situated was in a poor part of the town. It was, in fact, an old house badly converted to meet the use to which it was put. Every morning the narrow street was crowded with carts bringing fruit and vegetables, with lorries from the railway bearing crates of bananas and imported produce. The store-room, which had originally been the big drawing-room and dining-room of the house, was still adorned with marble mantelpieces of elaborate design, and the ceilings were decorated with massive cornices and convolutions in plaster. The damp fruit, the wet vegetables, had begun to rot the floor-boards, and when holes and splits became dangerous one of the porters nailed over the place a piece of wood, ripped from some crate. The paper was peeling from the walls, the whole place reeked of decaying fruit, and the heavy, dank odour of cabbages and cauliflowers. The yard behind the warehouse was piled high with empty boxes, for Fosdick refused to allow anything to be either thrown or given away, swearing that when he had sufficient time he intended to have the "whole b—— lot split and sold for firewood". From time to time he would stand and stare at the collection of decaying boxes, then rub his hands and state, "Damn' fortune piling up there!" His own private office was up the stairs, a room which was still hung with

faded strips of pink-and-white "satin" wallpaper. His desk was always in extreme disorder ; he was never able to find anything when he needed it, and yet he contrived to manage his bookmaking business with considerable success.

While Louis "checked in" and "checked out" the fruit, Fosdick sat upstairs interviewing the seedy individuals who—ostensibly fruit vendors—perpetually ascended and descended the rickety stairs. These were the street-corner bookies, bringing their paltry bets, written on dirty slips ; those bets which at the end of the week went to swell Fosdick's bank balance so pleasantly. From time to time there were arrests, prosecutions and fines levied. Fosdick paid the fines, took the men back into his service, but his name never appeared in the Press. After such an arrest nothing delighted him more than to say at the top of his voice, "Damn' silly fools, these street-corner men. They oughter know the police are bound ter get 'em in the end. Serves 'em right!" He was almost childish in his delight at his own cleverness, and would retail such remarks to Louis with delighted winks and nods.

Louis worked hard ; not that he minded it, for three pounds a week seemed to him to represent sufficient to demand a good many hours, and each hour filled with sixty minutes' hard work. He contrived to bring some kind of order to the place, realizing that if—with all the muddle and mess, the jumble of accounts, the welter of paid and unpaid bills—Fosdick had made the business pay, then with order and a system of checking the warehouse might be a small gold-mine.

He worked honestly enough, doing his duty, was as hard as nails with those people who could not pay their bills, and barely civil to those who paid regularly. He refused to have anything to do with the bookmaking side, though Fosdick perpetually begged him to leave the warehouse and manage the street-corner men.

"Wonder yer never have a gamble yerself," Fosdick grumbled.

Louis grinned. "I shall—when I've got something worth gambling with."

His mother gave it as her opinion that Bert Fosdick was a man with a good heart, for every night Louis brought home some of the most choice fruit from the warehouse. Three immense oranges, a couple of peaches, a few purple figs in their neat little paper cases, the first "mandarin" oranges, small, thin-skinned and sweet, delicately flavoured bananas, or smooth nectarines so finely coloured that they might have been tinted by hand.

"With Bert Fosdick's compliments," he would say as he laid them on the table.

Mum said, "Eh, that's a kindly 'carted man. I don't care what folks says against 'im, now then!"

One afternoon, just as Louis was preparing to leave the warehouse, Fosdick entered the little dirty office and pounced on two peaches which lay on Louis' desk.

"What's these here for?"

Louis, busy with his letter-book, said, without raising his eyes, "Samples."

"Samples—of what?"

"Peaches, obviously."

"Where are they goin'? Home with you, I suppose. You're the firm's sampler, are you?" Fosdick's face was purple with anger, his small eyes bloodshot.

"Yes, I'm taking them home."

"Might I ask"—his sarcasm was heavy and ineffective—"how long you've been doing this light-fingered business?"

Louis, his face unflushed, his eyes calm, replied, "Not so often as I should like. The stuff's not often sufficiently good. You ought to buy better fruit."

"For you ter eat! That's a damn' good 'un, that is."

"No, for the people to eat who are willing to pay top prices." He closed his book and reached forward to take one of the peaches in his long, slim fingers. "Look at that," he said, holding it out for Fosdick's inspection.

"That's not bad—it's the best there was in the consignment, but you can't call that a first-class peach. You're getting four bob a dozen—there are people who'd pay ten bob for decent fruit. It's short-sighted."

Fosdick scratched his chin with his finger-nail. Louis hated the rasping sound, it sent shivers down his spine. The big man stared at the peach, frowned, pursed his lips and grumbled, "I dunno. Where the devil can yer get first-class stuff?"

Louis gently laid the peach on its little bed of cotton-wool. Marjorie would enjoy it later. He had averted a scene, he had side-tracked Fosdick. Provided that he could start another hare, Fosdick would never give another thought to the matter of purloined peaches.

He swung himself up again on to his high stool. "There are places. There's Walton's place—Cummersley Hall. Huge gardens, gardeners not paid their wages half the time. No money—peaches, apricots, nectarines—God knows what all. They'll sell, the gardeners will, if they can find buyers. Cummersley is only one of many; there's Denby's, and Pullock's, and old Sir James Venn. I'll get the stuff if you'll start a high-priced range of fruit."

For twenty minutes he talked, giving facts and figures, working out reckonings on slips of paper, his eyes bright, his words well chosen and convincing. Fosdick listened, grunted and nodded his assent. "Well, let's have a pop at it." Louis swung off his stool. "Right. I'll work out a scheme tonight. Let you have it in the morning. That last lot of carrots from Wilson are about as much use as firewood."

His employer nodded again, "Give the —— hell in the morning."

"I intend to. Good night."

He walked away, slim-hipped, erect and handsome. Fosdick watched him, then called, "Here, ye've forgotten yer peaches."

Louis turned and walked back. His face was unmoveed; he showed not the slightest sign of either surprise or confusion. Picking up the peaches carefully, he slipped them into a paper bag. "Thanks," he said easily; "good night."

He carried his scheme through. It became known that Fosdick bought superb fruit, that his strawberries were earlier than those of the other dealers, that his peaches and wall fruit possessed a flavour lacking in those sold—and that only at rare intervals—by Bradstock's, Muer's or Levey's. The warehouse was no longer filled solely with men in corduroys and tweed caps. Men came who wore smart clothes, men who peered and prid at the fruit, buying with discrimination and care. There was the cheff from the Grand Hotel, the manager from the "Royal", Piers, the largest and most expensive fruiterer in the town. The best joke of all—and one which lasted both Fosdick and Louis Silver for weeks—was when Colonel Kelmersley entered the warehouse, accompanied by his friend the Hon. Belmont Vender, who, demanding peaches, declared, when they were brought for inspection, "Damme, Kelmersley, you can't grow stuff like that at Long Range!" To which Kelmersley replied, "If it comes to that, I don't know that you can produce anything like these!"

Later Fosdick was to grow purple in the face, and Louis was to rock with silent laughter, when they remembered that the peaches in question had come the night before from Long Range and Vender's estate.

II

On the evening of his twentieth birthday Louis surveyed his position. He sat in his bedroom, his hands clasped about his knees, his eyes grave and intent. He was earning—according to Bert Fosdick's wage sheet—four pounds a week.

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some lucky rumour caused twenty or more men to put their money on an unlikely outsider which unexpectedly romped home.

Louis had begun slowly and carefully. A buying price raised a halfpenny here, a selling price lowered a penny there—in the books. The difference slipped into his own pockets, and was later transferred—in small sums—to his own bank. The cashier knew that he worked for Bert Fosdick, noticed the continual, if small, stream of entries, laughed and said, "Lucky chap to work for a boss who gets good tips. That's about it, isn't it, Mr. Silver?"

Louis nodded, tapped the side of his nose with his forefinger and said, "I shouldn't wonder, anyway—they say all Jews are lucky."

In two years he had saved nearly five hundred pounds. Not bad, but, on the other hand, it was slow work. Two hundred and fifty a year saved would get him very little way by the time he was thirty! He earned four pounds a week; David, with Bennison, had crept painfully from thirty shillings to two pounds ten. Jane did wonders on four pounds ten, but she was growing old; Louis watched the increasing greyness of her hair, the additional stoop, and noticed how often she drew herself up sharply as if some invisible knife had stabbed her. Marjorie at fifteen was beginning to long for pretty clothes, for amusement, dancing classes and party frocks. Marjorie must have them too. Whoever went short, she should have all she wanted; he would see to that.

David was a good chap; Louis had an affection for his brother, tolerant and faintly disparaging perhaps, but sincere. David was so different from himself. He was satisfied with his ready-made suits and soled and re-soled boots, his darned socks, and his weekly visit to the theatre, where he occupied a cheap seat and talked about the performance for the rest of the week.

Louis thrust out his narrow foot and frowned at the shabby shoe. He turned up the bottom of his trouser-

leg and twisted his face with disgust at the edge, which showed signs of fraying. He had two suits, four shirts, and certainly not more than half a dozen pairs of socks, most of them only wearable because his mother darned them so beautifully and assiduously.

He had read a great deal, he had learnt how to make money, but he had never been out of England, rarely heard any good music, or seen a good play. He hated cheap seats, loathed going anywhere unless he could be certain of not occupying seats which marked him down as a member of the less important section of the public.

He spread his hands on his knees. They were fine hands, with long fingers and narrow wrists. They were not badly kept, but were stained and ingrained by the fruit which he constantly handled. What filthy stuff fruit could be ! Overripe plums, bruised oranges, sleepy pears and decayed apples—how he hated touching them, shuddering when his fingers broke the over-soft skin and plunged into a decomposing mess !

He had never made friends. The boys and men who would have been glad to go about with young Silver, who managed for Bert Fosdick, made no appeal to him. Even David had an opportunity to meet men of better education and wider outlook. True, David's friends were mostly pretty dull, so serious, so anxious to talk ponderously about their examinations, but they didn't discuss only girls, their chances of "getting off", or indulge in intimate disclosures concerning their real or—Louis suspected—fictitious successes, as did the young men Louis met in his business.

Night after night he came home, talked to his mother, helped Marjorie with her homework and went to bed. Admittedly he had to be up early. Six o'clock found him at the warehouse, superintending the deliveries, ready to attend to the buyers, entering details, checking statements, doing the hundred and one things which Fosdick—who sauntered down at about eleven—entrusted to him.

David had once said, "I wonder that you don't go to evening classes."

"Do you? I'm up at half past five every morning."

David cocked his head on one side as he did when considering anything. "It might be worth the effort. Book-keeping—"

"I've been keeping them for nearly two years—" Louis' smile flickered and died. "Satisfied the auditors."

"Shorthand, typing—"

"I don't need either. My own typist can do all that—when I get one."

"Oh, well, you know your own business best, Louis. I just thought . . ."

David was right to go to his classes; they seemed to be the breath of life to him. He rejoiced when he heard that some new subject had been added to the curriculum, and promptly schemed as to how he could fit in another set of classes. He brought home, at the end of each session, certificates, which he showed with restrained pride. To David certificates stood for attainment. Sometimes he talked, half shyly, to Louis of his ambitions.

"If some day I could get on—really get on," David said—"a head clerkship, pass some examinations, be almost as good as a full-blown solicitor! You know, get a decent salary, and—you never know—meet some awfully nice girl, get married and have a jolly little house with a bit of garden. That's my ambition. Not, of course, leave Mother in the lurch; I'd never do that, or young Margie."

Louis, his eyes half closed, said, "And work—work—work, eh?"

"There'd be holidays, of course."

"Scarborough, Whitby or Redcar—"

"Perhaps a country holiday some years—a farmhouse."

"Good God!"

David, serious-faced, puzzled and slightly discon-

erted, said, "But, Loo, why do you sneer at these things? They're decent, and great fun. We're here and we've got to work; lucky to have work, if you ask me, with so many poor devils tramping about without it. You talk and act as if you were going to do something tremendous, get a pile of money and live like a lord. People like us—like we are since Dad went smash—have to be content with small things, small pleasures. The high lights aren't for us."

"Aren't they?" The intensity in his voice startled David. "Not for us! By God, they'll be for me at any rate. I won't be content to work all my life. Life is going to give me what I want—linen and fine raiment, the upper seats at feasts, feasts that Lucullus would have appreciated, beautiful women—they're all coming my way, because I shall go after them and force them to—come with me. Make no mistake about that, David. You only want two things to get whatever you want—determination and ruthlessness. I have both."

David said doubtfully, "I don't know that I like the idea of being ruthless."

Louis almost snarled, "If you don't batter the world, it batters you! If you don't force it to give you the best, then it gets you to your knees. I have had enough of poverty to last me for the rest of my life."

David, clear-skinned and blue-eyed, watched and listened with something that was almost dismay. He had never heard Louis talk in this way before. He had known him when he had been moody, depressed, when he had sat silent, and not even Marjorie had been able to rouse him and tease him to a more cheerful state of mind. David had said so often to his mother that Loo took things hard.

"Aye," Jane agreed, "Loo kicks against the pricks overmuch, poor lad."

Now his dark eyes were blazing, he stood with his hands clenched as if he defied the whole world. A queer,

disconcerting fellow, Louis. Two days later, having thought and planned, having covered sheets of paper with his meticulously neat figures, Louis launched his ultimatum. At about eleven o'clock Fosdick came into the warehouse; he lounged up to Louis' desk, sprawled against it, and, with a half-smoked cigar between his tobacco-stained teeth, inquired, "Had a good morning?"

"Not too bad. Too much work, that's the trouble."

Fosdick chuckled. "Ah—I thought you liked work! Getting sick of it?"

"I do like work, but I like it to lead somewhere. This is leading nowhere."

The elder man removed the cigar, spat on the dirty floor, then said, "It's provided you with a decent living—and free fruit—for some years, any road."

Louis finished his entries in the ledger, laid his pen in the rack, dusted his fingers carefully with a clean handkerchief—for the books were invariably covered with dust, and he loathed dirt. Fosdick said that he was "as finicky as an old maid".

His attitude, Fosdick decided, was insolent. The fellow might have been a duke with the airs he gave himself. He took a cigarette out of a yellow packet as if it were a gold case holding the finest brand of cigarettes on the market!

"You see," Louis began, his voice even and almost superior, as if he offered an explanation to someone who was his mental inferior, "this work is a dead end. I shall never get any further—and I can get further given a chance. If this business doesn't offer one, then I must make one for myself. I think that's clear, Mr. Fosdick."

"You mean—you'll go?" For the life of him he could not keep the dismay he felt from his tone. Silver to go! Silver, who was never late, who took all the responsibility, increased the business, provided money which could be spent in the bar of the "Grand" and the "Crown". It wasn't possible.

Silver merely shrugged his shoulders by way of reply.

"Damn it," Fosdick burst out, "what the hell do you want? More money?"

"More opportunities."

Fosdick swallowed hard. He wasn't the man he had been, he knew that. He drank too much, lived too hard, spent his nights in an atmosphere which was heavy with smoke and the fume of spirits. It was becoming more and more of an effort to talk business, to see that no one "diddled" him. Damn 'em, they were all such good fellows—on paper, but when it came to a deal . . . ! He had been conscious several times that men eyed him closely, and still retained sufficient wit to know that they summed him up both quickly and justly.

"Fosdick was on the bat last night. He isn't fit to argue. Jostle him a bit, rattle him and he'll say anything." That was what they said!

"Blast it," he ejaculated, "I'll make you a partner."

"That's very generous. I should want equal power with you."

"Isn't that like you!" Fosdick stormed. "I make you an offer which is positively crazy, it's so b—— generous, and whatcher do? Quibble an' argue. Damn it, isn't a partnership good enough for you?"

Louis' smile was filled with real amusement. "Let's examine this offer," he said. "A partnership. I continue to come down at six every day, I shoulder all responsibilities, but if I propose any alterations, improvements, they will almost certainly be vetoed by you. In point of fact, I should have exactly the same duties, with some additional work added, with possibly another thirty shillings a week. It's scarcely worth it to me."

"Improvements? Hell, what improvements d'yer want to make?"

The bright dark eyes lost some of their hardness, the full mouth softened. Louis began to speak of his dreams.

"I want retail shops as well as the warehouse; not

dirty little greengrocers', but places where people know they can get the best stuff, even if they have to pay the best prices. I want smart delivery vans, and men who will serve with discretion and ability. Men who are well turned out, in white aprons and jackets. Something—with style. Oh, I know what I want." He laughed softly.

"Oh, that's whatcher want, is it?" Fosdick glanced at his watch. He was due to meet Jimmie Baker in ten minutes, and he wanted a drink badly.

"Well, I'll think it over and let you know some time. There's no hurry."

"I can only give you twenty-four hours. I've the chance of a good shop, and can't afford to lose it. If you don't come in, I start alone."

"If you don't come in" I The sauce of the fellow!

"Twenty-four hours. That's the way you talk after all I've done for yer. My God, you ruddy Jews! Out for yourselves every time. Never think of anyone else. Unscrupulous gang you are. Twist anyone's tail as soon as look. Thank God, I haven't got—"

Louis smiled, "Surely the world is to blame. When everyone is against you, you're a fool not to look after yourself, and if it comes to tail-twisting—well, the Christians have been fairly clever at that."

Fosdick stared at him, his lips moving, then, licking them because the thought of that drink with Jimmie Baker loomed large in his mind, he turned and muttered, "Oh, all right, don't make a song and dance about it. Twenty-four hours." He lumbered out of the warehouse. Louis Silver sat down and opened another ledger. He'd won, and he knew it.

III

In six months Fosdick and Silver had opened two retail shops. They were staffed entirely by Jews—smart,

clever fellows who took a pride in their work, looked clean and neat, and knew how to smile when they said 'Good morning' to a customer. Louis still arrived at the warehouse at six o'clock in the morning and later visited the shops. He showed his assistants how to dress their windows, impressed upon them that green leaves were cheap, and that fruit laid upon them looked better than that displayed in the ordinary way. He instituted competitions in window-dressing, offered prizes to the salesman who had the highest amount to his credit for the week, and kept his eyes and ears well open. He made special offers of cheap fruit for jam-making, oranges for the marmalade season, and gave away slips of paper on which were printed his mother's famous recipes for pickling walnuts, onions, cabbage and other delicacies of a like nature.

"Never say definitely—unless it's something which is palpably impossible, such as strawberries in December—that you can't supply anything. 'Sorry, madam'—don't be sparing with the 'madam', they like it and it costs nothing—'Sorry, madam. At the moment we have none, but if you will allow me to telephone the warehouse I will make inquiries. Even if they haven't got it there, Mr. Silver might be able to obtain it in the town.' Telephone me if you like, but be certain to telephone the customer half an hour later and offer profuse apologies. Say that it's a pineapple—very well : 'We regret, madam, the last one had just gone from the warehouse five minutes before I telephoned. Mr. Silver thinks that he might get one from Leeds by tomorrow morning if you wished it.' Lard—that's what it is—lard. I've watched my mother pouring fat over a chicken she was roasting ; she told me she did it to keep it juicy. Very well, then, lard your customers and keep 'em juicy !"

Then he would laugh and show his white even teeth, and the young Jews would smile back at him, and, later, give it as their opinion that the Boss was clever.

Issy Reubens said, "Well, he's one of us, ain't he?"

"I heard that he wasn't," young Cohen declared. "I heard that he was just plain English."

"You heard! You heard a lot, didn't you? 'Course he's a Jew. You never heard an Englishman attack business that way, did you?"

The shops paid. Women who lived in the new villas which were springing up on the outskirts of the town liked the cheerful shops with their piles of well-polished apples, the oranges which made such a splash of colour, brightening the grey winter days; most of all they liked the obliging, white-aproned young men, so willing to help, so anxious that every customer should obtain complete satisfaction. They said repeatedly, "Ah yes, Fosdick's may charge a ha'penny or even a penny more, but you can *rely* on their goods, and they so often have things that no other shops ever get—real hot-house fruit, the very first mushrooms, and—well, foreign things—most interesting."

Fosdick himself was delighted. Slowly the new venture became, in the bars of his favourite hotels, not Louis' idea, but his own. With his chest expanded, a glass of whisky-and-soda in his hand, his hat at the back of his head, Bert Fosdick would enlarge upon the series of "brain-waves" which had swept over him. As the hour grew later the stories became more and more fantastic. He was one of the master minds of the county, he was the patron and benefactor of Louis Silver—"Little Yiddisher chap, who likes to pretend that he isn't, but I catch him out once in a way—as I catch everyone out, once in a way, if they try to pull wool over Bert Fosdick's eyes." He was a salesman, an organizer, a first-class buyer; he was everything that made for unlimited success.

While Bert Fosdick boasted and bragged, Louis evolved a scheme for selling such fruit as depreciated quickly or had already begun to lose its first freshness.

Two seedy-looking fellows with barrows—one bearing the name "J. Turner", the other "C. Smith", called each evening for fruit which no longer came up to the standard demanded by Fosdick and Silver. Louis personally superintended the stocking of the barrows, which he himself had bought and paid for. He had also discovered J. Turner and C. Smith, and paid for their hawkers' permits.

"What happens to yer waste stuff?" Fosdick once asked.

"In decently kept shops," Louis replied, "there is precious little waste stuff. Oranges, apples, potatoes keep indefinitely if they're looked after. The rest—well, what does it amount to? Soft stuff I can nearly always get rid of at a cheap rate for jam or pickling. Nothing excites these women more than the idea of a bargain. Ten pounds at a penny a pound—they're after it, bruised stuff and all!"

He was almost incessantly tired, working as he did from six in the morning until after seven at night, but he was content. His bank balance grew, and he was finding it necessary to give racing tips to his bank manager or the cashier at discreet intervals. He had to account for the amounts which were paid in so regularly. Once, when the cashier, with eyebrows raised inquiringly and voice dropped to a whisper, asked, "Anything good, Mr. Silver?" Louis replied, "I don't know if it's running today, but it made a good deal of money for me—'Barrow'."

CHAPTER FIVE

I

1929 OPENED WELL FOR LOUIS SILVER. HE HAD NEARLY two thousand pounds in the bank, the fruit trade was good, new methods of transit were making it possible to supply fruit more easily, at lower prices and with a much larger range. He had begun to specialize in the lesser-known foreign fruits—Avocado pears, prickly pears, Italian figs, nespoli and others.

His barrows had been increased, two ex-Service men joining Turner and Smith. Fusdick's had opened one new shop in the suburban district and another in a small market town not many miles distant. Louis invested in a second-hand motor-cycle and side-car, charged the firm with the petrol, and took Marjorie or his mother for runs into the country on Sundays.

Marjorie at seventeen had grown tall, slim and beautifully proportioned. She was the pride of Louis' heart. With the exception of his mother, she was the only living creature he would not have sold for money or advancement. She was the only really beautiful thing in his life, and he was never tired of watching her. He might wear boots which were patched and soled as long as the uppers would hold; his clothes, although neat and well kept, might be cheap and shabby, but Marjorie must have the best always. He almost grudged having his hair cut, so anxious was he to save every penny. He had never taken a holiday since the year his father died, although David always managed a week at one of the popular seaside resorts, and Louis insisted that Marjorie and his mother must go away every year for a fortnight.

To them he was generous, although he denied himself consistently.

At twenty-two Louis Silver had attained his full height. He was above the average, but his slim body and narrow hips made him appear taller than he was in reality. He was undeniably handsome. The women who caught sight of him when he visited the shops followed him with their eyes and fluttered a little when he gave them a grave, "Good morning, madam". He looked older than his years, for he had become used to responsibility, and had purposely cultivated a manner which was mature and confident.

Fosdick had almost ceased to come to the warehouse at all. About three times a week he came in, and never stayed longer than ten minutes. The bookmaking business had been on the point of being extinguished—indeed, Bert Fosdick had said more than once that he was "sick of the whole b—— business"—when Louis, who could not bear to see money thrown away, installed young Cohen's brother, had the office cleaned and repapered, and together he and Cohen raised the bookmaking from a third-rate to a first-class concern. On the majority of mornings Louis walked round to eat his luncheon at the "Grand". The firm paid his bills, and it was an opportunity to see Fosdick and force him to discuss a certain amount of business, or sign papers which needed his signature.

In his cups, when his eyes were blurred and his speech thick, Fosdick would lay his hand, with its swollen veins and freckles, on Louis' smooth thin one, saying, "Goo' f'ller, Schilver. Goo' f'ller. Thash right, muk' moneyf't poor old man—poor old Bert Fosdick. 'Member I trust you, b'lieve in yer. Always did, always shall."

He had an affection for Silver. He realized that he had long ago lost the ability to make money, and whatever Silver did, or did not do, the concerns of Fosdick and Silver prospered. Fosdick still lived in his big ugly house;

it was still run inefficiently by maids who for ever came and went. Louis often suspected that Fosdick carried on amorous affairs with them, and when they grew insolent ordered them to go. At intervals Louis dined there, eating badly cooked food, served in the dining-room, where the dust lay on everything.

"I've often thought," he said to Fosdick one evening after dinner, "I should like to run your house for you. I'd save money and get you more comfort."

"Wish yer could. No comfort here. Pack o' lazy bitches; bloodsuckers, that's what they are. Barring that new little gal—Jennie. Pretty li'l thing; nice bit of skirt. Works hard, too."

Louis yawned, and said lazily, "What at, I wonder?"

Fosdick reddened, his face changing from scarlet to purple. "Oh, shiver-up, you!"

"I thought so."

"You thought what?" Fosdick shouted. "You think too damn' much! Dirty-minded Yid!"

But his tempers were short-lived, and the next morning he would be good-humoured again, caring nothing for the business, only demanding sufficient money to buy drinks and luncheons at the "Grand" or the "Crown".

July came; David went off for his holiday to the Lakes; he was to do a walking tour with four friends and—David flushed when he said it—"their sisters. I'm the only odd man out". He returned with a look in his eyes which had not been there before. He was inclined to smile quietly, and he worked harder than ever. He was trying to pass his first legal examination, and said to Louis, "If I pass it it means everything to me—everything." He pulled out his note-case, extracting four small snapshots, and passed them, half-shyly, to Louis. "That's—the reason for everything."

Louis looked at them carefully. There was David in shorts, laden with a rucksack like a beast of burden, carrying an ash plant, and with him several young men and

women, who—to Louis—all looked singularly alike—all dull, all uninspiring.

"Which is—the reason?" he asked.

Slightly indignant, David replied, pointing to the photographs, "Why, that, and in this photo—that one. Here she is again, and there! Terribly attractive, isn't she? I'd like you to meet her some time, Loo."

Louis nodded. He felt suddenly old and regretful, so much older than David, possessing more knowledge, and having lost that belief in things and people—in almost everything except himself.

"I should like to. Are you engaged, David?"

"We-ell," his tone was dubious, "you see, it's difficult at the moment. She's got a father and mother, and she and her brother—he's in my office, his name's Fotherly—have to keep the home fires burning. We couldn't be married until—well, until I had a good deal more money, or—something happened to them. Sounds brutal, but there it is. She's a teacher at Lower Calton Street Schools. Very clever; brilliant, in fact."

"Yes, it's difficult."

He wasn't really attending. He was wondering if he would ever find a girl who filled his eyes with the look which he saw in David's, if he would ever dream dreams concerning her and their future life together. No woman had ever attracted him for a moment. He saw them in the shops, wished them "Good morning"; and was often perfectly conscious that they were willing to talk to him. He had seen admiration in their eyes, caught sudden, swift glances of interest—and even something less innocent—and he had been amused. Women, as women, must be amusing to know—interesting perhaps, exciting. One day he would know them; not little teachers from the council schools, but women like those he had seen driving through the town in immense cars, wrapped in furs, smiling and laughing, expensive, luxury-loving creatures, like great Persian cats.

He said, "I hope it will all come right for you, David. Good luck!"

David put the photographs back in his case. "Thanks, Loo. I know that you'll like Gracie."

Jane and Marjorie went off to Scarborough in the third week of July. Louis said that he might manage to run over for August Bank Holiday week-end. He'd go over on the motor-cycle. Marjorie said, "Oh, do, darling. It will be such fun!"

He'd been worried lately about both Marjorie and his mother, for different reasons. Jane was failing, growing thinner and older. Her hair was quite grey, her face had lost its old roundness. Louis, watching her, felt spasms of fear. What if anything happened to Jane? If only she could keep well; in a few years he would give her all she wanted—all the things that to her meant luxury and ease. When she came back from her holiday she must have a girl in to help her with the work. He could afford that—what did daily helps cost? Not so much, surely.

And Marjorie. She had left school, and was pestering him to put her into one of the shops.

"No, no," Louis said. "We don't want you in a shop, dear. Wait and we'll find something that you'll really like to do. Not a shop!"

He wasn't going to have his lovely young sister in one of Fosdick's fruit-shops, shut up in a beastly cash-desk all day, or soiling her hands with fruit. He'd fought hard enough to keep her at school, and a decent school too; he wasn't going to let all that effort be wasted.

Marjorie teased and tried to persuade him, but he was adamant. Even Jane said, "Well, Loo, I don't really see why she shouldn't. It's nice for a girl to be earning something, an' in one of your shops you could always keep an eye on 'er. I can't see why not."

"Because I won't have her there; that's the only reason that matters."

Marjorie pouted. "I do think that you're mean, Louis."

"Wait until I want a very special private secretary," he said.

She twisted away from him. "Oh—always wait—wait—wait."

Had anyone else spoken so to him, Louis would have flared back, said bitter and harsh words, desperately resented their attitude. Because it was his sister who spoke, he laughed, twisted one of her curls in his fingers, and said teasingly, "Now then—remember that you're speaking to your big brother!"

On the Saturday before August Bank Holiday he managed to finish his rounds of the shops early, changed, and started off for Scarborough. He was as excited as a schoolboy over the prospect of his brief holiday. He would have two full days to stroll about with Marjorie and his mother, to enjoy the fresh air, the sea, and forget that such a thing as fruit—sold either wholesale or retail—existed.

Jane was waiting for him at the rooms which he had engaged for them. She assured him that she felt better, that her appetite was coming back, and that it was a wonderful holiday.

"That's what my good boy's done for his mother," she said, beaming at him, plying him with tea and cake. "Made a new woman o' me."

Louis smiled. "Bless you," he said. "I say, where's Marjorie?"

"Well, seemly, it's some special show at the concert party, an' she didn't wanter miss it. She'll be in any minute. She's pretty well as excited as what I am at your being here, Lou."

Rushing in a few minutes later, Marjorie seemed thrilled, laughing and talking, begging Louis to take her for a run on his motor-bicycle, assuring him that he must come down to hear Collin's Concert Party that very evening.

"But," Louis said, "you've been there this afternoon."

"It's a different programme tonight. Special Bank Holiday one."

"Bank Holiday's on Monday." He teased her.

She shook her head impatiently, so that the tight, short curls swung backwards and forwards. "Oh, Louis, don't tease! It's for Bank Holiday Saturday, then. How exact you are! Oh, they are good, aren't they, Mum? The fat man—isn't he fat, too!—I like him best of all. He's really funny, not just silly stuff. And the two girls—Constance Mills and Georgie Francuster—they are so pretty. One dark and one fair—"

Mum said, "And what about Le Roy Lennox—?"

Marjorie's face flushed scarlet; she said almost pettishly, "Oh, Mum, don't be so silly. Mr. Lennox is very clever; I like to listen to him—"

"And buy post-cards of him," Jane said, smiling slyly.

"Do be quiet!" Marjorie snapped suddenly. "I've got post-cards of them all. There's nothing in that, surely."

Later she persuaded Louis to take her to the evening performance. She was pleased to be with him, and from time to time glanced at him as he walked along beside her. How good-looking he was, in that dark, rather romantic style; so slim and straight, too, wearing a new dark-blue suit with a thin stripe in it. She had told Le Roy Lennox all about Louis. "My good-looking brother. So successful. Yes, he owns three shops and a warehouse. No, wholesale *and* retail. He's very rich really, and going to be much richer. Everyone says that he's got a great career before him."

"End Ay'm shaw," said Le Roy Lennox, "thet Aym talking naow to his favourite sister, what?"

"I'm the only sister that he's got, anyway."

"Then Ay'm shaw he is very devoted tuc yew—naow could he be otherwise?" He quoted softly and with a

good deal of expression : " 'Tew see her ees tew love her,
And to love but her for evah'."

Quietly content, Louis walked along with his sister. He was happy to be with her, listening to her chatter, rejoicing in her light laughter. Life was a good business after all, particularly when Marjorie was so obviously happy, and Mum declared that she felt better. The air seemed to invigorate him. He thought excitedly, 'In a moment we shall turn the corner and catch sight of the sea !'

Marjorie said suddenly, "Oh, Louis, here's Le Roy Lennox."

Louis said softly, but with determination, "Curse him, whoever he is!"

"Oh, Louis—he's so nice, such a gentleman."

Louis saw a tall, thin fellow in immaculate flannels coming towards them. His tie and belt, if not precisely the colours worn by the Brigade of Guards, were so like them as to be practically indistinguishable. His brown-and-white shoes caught and held the attention, his socks and shirt were of white silk. Louis hated him on sight.

Marjorie said, "Oh, Mr. Lennox, this is my brother Louis."

Lennox offered a long, narrow, rather flabby hand. "Delighted, Ay'm shaw."

He turned back to Marjorie. "Gaoing down tew the show, what? Thet's the idea. Ay'll walk with yew, if yew've no objection. Oh, haow these people stare at one!"

"The penalty of popularity," Louis said.

"Oh, Ay don't know about that. Ay leave that for others to say, eh, Miss Marjorie?"

Before he left them he begged that they would join him after the show at an open-air café "for a sneck". Louis, bored to death with the man, his affectations and vapidities, tried to excuse himself, but the look of disappointment on Marjorie's face checked him.

"Only," Louis said, "I don't like leaving my mother alone too long."

Lennox said readily, "Oh, but—bring the dear thing, won't you? Ay like her so much."

Marjorie, speaking very quickly, made her suggestion. "After the show, my brother will go home for my mother. I'll wait for you, Mr. Lennox, and you shall take me to the Garden Café. They'll join us there."

"That," declared Mr. Lennox, "that will be quite, quite perfect."

II

Holidays were over. Louis was working harder than ever, David was looking forward to the beginning of the evening classes, Mum grumbling that the daily help ought to have been called "the daily hindrance", while Marjorie wanted to go into a shop, wanted to learn dressmaking, declared that she wanted nothing so much as to be a book-keeper. She changed her ideas every week. Louis listened, tolerantly smiling, and not a little amused.

There were times when Marjorie worried him. Times when he wondered if he ought not to encourage her to learn some trade, ought not to find her some occupation; but she was so pretty, her well-kept hands, shining hair and smooth skin gave him such delight, that he could not bear the thought of her going out to enter the ranks of the workers. He had dreams for her, plans which should materialize when he had made the money he wanted. He would have a really dignified house; men—decent, well-educated men—should be invited there, Marjorie would be able to take her choice, marry some man who could keep her as she ought to be kept. Marjorie was going to be a lady!

She wasn't very clever, Louis admitted, but who wanted a girl, as pretty as Marjorie, to be clever? She could play the piano quite nicely, she could sing the

latest musical-comedy hits in a high, thin, but very sweet voice, she could make cakes—provided that Mum did all the washing-up and clearing away—she was pretty, sweet and lovable. At nearly eighteen she was all that Louis had dreamed she would be when they were both children.

True, there were times when he wished she would not speak so sharply to her mother, but even then he would excuse her on the ground that young people never took criticism kindly. Louis never thought of himself as young; he felt that he had never possessed any youth. At nearly twenty-three he could scarcely remember the time when he had not worked; his school-days had retreated into a distance so dim and remote that they seemed improbable, a state which had never existed except in his imagination.

His life was bounded by his work—the warehouse and Fosdick, then later his visits to Ripley Street, Malvern Road, and Craigmiller Avenue, arrangements with the barrow-men, and then home to wash, eat and sleep.

'One day,' he told himself, 'one day I'll make up for all these hours of work. One day I'll have everything!'

He returned home one evening in December to find his mother waiting, white-faced, for his arrival. The night was bitterly cold; all day Louis had been conscious that although his overcoat might be heavy it lacked warmth. The shoddy cloth hung clumsily, the skirt of the coat flapped round his legs, making him feel that he carried a burden, something which checked his easy movements. His boots were recently re-soled; a nail had worked through and was piercing his foot. His temper was raw.

He entered, the warmth of the little sitting-room making his cold hands tingle. "Hello, Jane dear."

Jane said, "Oh—Loo," then again: "Loo dear—"

Louis frowned, looked at her closely. "You're ill!"

She shook her head. "No, ducky—upset. I don't know what we'll do. Loo dear, Marjorie's run away."

"Marjorie's run away?" he repeated slowly. "What on earth do you mean?"

"She's left this 'ere note. Slipped out whilst I was shopping this morning. Says as she knew we'd be agen it, so she's just gone. Oh, Loo!"

"Show me." Louis held out his hand.

Jane passed him the note. She must have held it in her hand for a long time, Louis thought; it was warm.

Dearest Mum,

I don't want you or the boys to be upset, but I have run away to be married to Le Roy. We have been in love ever since Scarborough and can't live without each other. I know that you'll all be cross with me, but try, please, to forgive me. By the time you read this I'll be married. Le Roy has everything ready. The County Theatre at Telford will find me; Le Roy is playing there in pantomime. Please don't be cross. I will bring Le Roy to see you all, one day quite soon, then you'll love him as I do.

*Ever your so loving,
Marjorie.*

Louis said, "My God, if I find the brute I'll wring his damn' neck!"

Jane shook her head. "Nay, Loo, it's not a bit o' use getting vi'lent. That won't help any. What's done's done; we must make the best on it. Eh, to think that a girl o' mine could be so downright naughty!"

Then David came in; the note was read again, and David gave it as his opinion that they'd all spoiled Marjorie, and that they were to blame. She'd always had everything she wanted; well, now she wanted this fellow, and she'd got him. She'd probably filled her head with romantic novels, and the idea of running away, leaving notes and so forth, made an appeal to her. No sense in trying to bring her home; she'd made her bed and—

Louis said sharply, "That's all right, David ; we know that. What we didn't know was Marjorie's reaction to this—spoiling. I'm going to Yelford. The chances are that they won't be married until tomorrow. In that case, she'll come home with me ; I'll see to that."

They had been married by the time Louis arrived at the dingy town of Yelford, where tall chimneys belched out smoke, and clog-shod feet clattered down the streets, where whistles blew with shrill blasts to call men and women to work, and where "pro's" were still looked upon with a kind of fascinated distaste.

Louis found the County Theatre. He had never been to a stage door before, and the dust and drabness surprised him. He had imagined that the interiors of all theatres, behind or in front of the curtain, were luxurios.

"Private address?" inquired the stout man who sat behind a counter smoking a particularly foul pipe. "What 'ud you be wantin' ter know it fur? Debts—is that it?"

"No. I'm—I'm his brother-in-law."

"Oh—aye. I did 'ear suthink abart Lennox gettin' wed. Fair-'aired girl, bonny-lukein'. Aye—that's right. An' you're t'bruther-i'-law, eh? Luke at that! Well, address is Somme Street, number sixteen. They don't start re'carsing while termorrer, no. Lennox is playin' one o't'Oogly Sisters. So 'e's married yer sister, 'as 'e? Now, I allus thought as Lennox weren't t'marryin' sort. Oh, 'e's bin 'ere before, several times. I allus thought that 'e was a nancy fellow. Aye, I did straight. Just shows 'ow mistaken yer can be. Aye, sixteen Somme Street. Mrs. Ach'r's. Aye, that's right."

Louis walked the length of Somme Street, where grey houses of exactly the same pattern stood flush with the pavement. Well, Longland's Road was a good deal better than this. Number sixteen looked precisely like its neighbours, fourteen and eighteen. The same lace curtains, the same aspidistra standing on a bamboo table

in the centre of the window, the same lobby with a coco-nut mat, and a door with red and blue stained glass.

A small girl, wearing a dirty apron, opened the door about a foot.

"What was it?" she asked.

"May I see Mrs. Lennox?"

The child did not reply; leaning back from the door, she yelled, "Mrs. Lennox, will yer see a gentleman what's called, please?"

A man's voice called downstairs, "Oh, Gard I", and Marjorie's voice added immediately, "Yes, coming, Lizzie. Show the gentleman into the sitting-room."

It was a small room, smelling of dust, crowded with plush-covered furniture, the walls and mantelpiece bearing numerous photographs—all signed with affectionate greetings. The fire burned sulkily, and Louis, standing on the hearth-rug, stared moodily at the black caked mass among which one or two bright sparks showed, thinking of Marjorie's modern gas-fire, which had been installed in her bedroom last winter because she hated the cold.

A second later Marjorie entered the room.

"Darling Louis," she cried, "I knew that you'd come."

He put out his hands, laid them on her shoulders and stared at her.

"Louis darling, are you awfully cross? You see, we both knew that you'd make fusses if you heard we wanted to get married. We're terribly, dreadfully in love; something had to be done about it, and"—she laughed—"I ran away."

He said, "You're married, eh?"

"Yesterday, an hour after I got here. Oh, Louis, do smile!"

"I don't feel like smiling," he said. "I want to see this fellow, want to hear if he can keep you decently. This place"—he made a gesture indicating the room and its contents—"isn't even properly clean. God knows what the rest of the house is like! Where is Lennox?"

"I think"—there was doubt in her tone—"I think that he's getting up."

"Just ask him to hurry. I want to talk to him, and I've no time to waste."

She sidled up to him. "Louis, do be nice. You can't blame people for falling in love, getting married. You don't really know Le Roy, don't know how sweet he is, so clever—and, Louis, he is a gentleman."

"Is he? Well, tell him to come and talk to someone who isn't a gentleman, but who is in a hurry, Marjorie. It's no good, my dear, trying to coax me into a good temper. I'm angry—disappointed and angry. You might have trusted us, Marjorie. It wasn't fair to go off like that, to upset Mother as you did. It was selfish, unkind and damn' childish. You've probably made a bad bargain, and it will take us all our time to get you out of it."

"A bad bargain!" The surprise on her face, the expression in her eyes, startled him. "Le Roy a—bad bargain. How dare you, Louis! He's the dearest and best man in the world—yes, not even excepting you. I won't allow you to say a word against him. That's not fair, if you like! When he's not here to answer you. I'll tell him that you want to speak to him."

"Please do."

Left alone, he thought, 'God, she's actually in love with him. It's not only a childish infatuation, it's something deeper than that. How curious. Marjorie—so pretty, petted, spoiled if you like—should love that mincing, cheap clown!'

Lennox entered, clad in a dressing-gown of black artificial silk sporting a glaring design of sunflowers and wistaria, his neck wrapped in a handkerchief which bore the colours of a famous school.

He said, "Hello, hello—how is mee brothah-in-law this morning?"

Louis said, "Sit down, I want to talk to you."

"Willingly ; I nevah stend when Ay can sit. Darling Marjorie, give me a cigarette, my sweet. Naow, Louis."

"Now"—he plunged straight into what he had to say—"what is all this about ? If you wanted to marry my sister, why didn't you come and see us, as any decent man would have done, not persuade her to sneak off to this hole and marry you ? However, that's done ; what matters now is—can you keep her ?"

"When the gods, the agents and the British public are kind—yes."

"And when they're not kind ?"

"Oh, well, then—we shall heve to live on my wife's money."

"She has none !"

Lennox smiled blandly. "She heppens to heve a rich brothah."

"If you've banked on that, you've shinned up the wrong tree, Lennox."

"Surely—"

"I don't happen to be rich, and if I were, not a penny would go to you. To my sister--certainly--but not to you. What engagements have you after this pantomime, and how long does that last ?"

"Pento here"—Lennox frowned, drew hard on his cigarette and blew four beautiful smoke-rings—"pento here lasts—the public being willing—for five weeks. Later—Ay'm in touch, close touch, with a man who may be reviving *This Country Girl*. In that case Ay may—"

Louis said briskly, "May—might—I understand. That means precisely nothing. And later still . . . ?"

"Ay presume that Collins will warnt me for Scarborough again. Ay was his biggest draw—and he knew it. Ay imagine that he is certain to approach me—in which case . . ."

Louis turned to his sister ; his face was expressionless, his eyes hard.

"Look here, when this bright beauty can't keep you,

comes home. He's been banking on an allowance; well, he won't get it, neither will you." He spun round again to Lennox. "Look here, if I contrived—somehow—to make you an allowance—a good allowance—would you give my sister grounds so that she could get rid of you—?"

Marjorie cried, "Louis, how can you say such things? How dare you!"

Lennox stared, as if Louis' words had fascinated him. "But—but . . ." He stumbled. "You said that you weren't rich—"

Louis laughed. "That's answered me. You ought to have smacked my face! Well, that's settled. Marjorie, come home when you want to—but come alone."

All the way back home, seated in the corner of a chilly third-class carriage, Louis Silver sat with his arms folded, his chin on his chest, recalling the theatrical sitting-room at Yelford, seeing Lennox again in his fantastic, effeminate dressing-gown, remembering how pretty Marjorie had looked when she cried with such indignation, "How dare you!"

'If only *he'd* said that,' Louis thought, 'I might have felt more hopeful about the whole wretched business.'

CHAPTER SIX

I

"NOT A PENNY," LOUIS SAID. "I'VE SEEN THE FELLOW and listened to him. If Marjorie likes to fling away everything for the sake of a second-rate pimp like that—let her."

Jane watched him, her kindly eyes filled with tears.

"Lou, don't be 'ard, dear. She's young—eighteen. She's in love with 'im, and when girls is in love they do silly things. Be kind. If he's outer work, surely you an' me an' David can spare 'ev a bit?"

David nodded. "I don't mind sending something—though it's not easy."

"That's a dear kind boy," Jane said, but her eyes were still watching Louis. "An' you will too, Lou, won't you?"

He stared at them both, his dark eyes narrowed, his expression hard.

"No," he said, "not a penny, unless she likes to leave him and comes back home. Don't ask me again, Mother, please."

He turned and walked out of the room, going upstairs to his own bedroom, to sit in the old basket chair, his face still twisted with anger, his hands clenched, his whole attitude one of concentrated fury. No one knew, he reflected, what Marjorie's going had meant to him. Of all his ventures, his investments, she had been the one on which he had relied most. She had been the one beautiful thing in his life, the one ideal which he cherished. For her he had worked, scrimped and saved, denied himself continually. He loved his mother, he respected David, but Marjorie had been the great hope which had

animated his actions. He had been so ambitious for her. He had dreamed dreams concerning her, built castles in the air and made plans without end.

'One day, when I am rich'—for he never doubted that one day he would have all the money he needed to realize his ambitions—'I'll take her round the world. She shall have clothes from the finest dressmakers, she shall have jewels, and furs, cars and servants. Men will desire her, they will curry favour with me in order to know her, they will ask her to marry them, and—because I shall advise her wisely—she will eventually decide on one who will give her a real place in the world. Not some wretched local magnate, but a man who knows his world, and who is known by the world.'

And now she had run away from home and married a third-rate actor, with not a penny to his name, lacking in ambition, and probably in any talent, who suggested that they might live on Marjorie's family !

David, saving money as hard as he could, was ready to help Le Roy Lennox and Marjorie, was prepared to deplete his own savings to make life easier for them. His mother would pinch and scrape out of the housekeeping money, denying herself small luxuries, so that she too might render assistance to that pasty-faced horror, whose affectation of superiority even prevented him from speaking the King's English. Well, let them—let David make sacrifices, let his mother deny herself—so much the more fools they !

Let Marjorie come home, admit that she had made a mistake, and he—Louis Silver—would do all that he had planned and more. He would have an added interest in making money to spend on Marjorie, because it might be possible that one day they might see Lennox, shabby and down at heel, while they drove past in a car ! The thought of possibly splashing Le Roy Lennox with mud from their car-wheels gave Louis a sense of excited expectancy.

He had written to her after his visit to Yelford :

You must realize that you have made a mistake. Lennox is no good to you ; he's a sponger. He'll never get anywhere ; he's lazy and inefficient, a poseur, self-satisfied and cheap. Come home, leave him, and you shall have all that I've always planned to give you. I have a certain amount of money ; you shan't want for anything. Only—come home, and come alone.

Louis.

She had sent his letter back to him, with a line scrawled at the bottom :

I told you that I love my husband. I'm proud to be his wife.

M.

Louis had paced his room, the letter clutched in his hand. He had cursed his sister for a fool ; he had silently railed against her romantic stupidity. Did she know what she was flinging away ? Throwing aside the things that had solid worth for a man like Lennox ! She was crazy, she had no gratitude, no sense of duty. Bad enough that she should, in a moment of childish attraction, have married the man, but, having had her mistake pointed out to her, having heard her husband's reaction to Louis' suggestions, where was her pride that she did not come home and begin again ?

Louis repeated, "She's not worth bothering about. She's a fool, and I have no time for fools ! Let her go ; what do I care ?"

In his heart he knew that these were words, that they carried no conviction with them, and that he was utterly miserable. He missed her laughter, her funny little methods of wheedling money out of him, her love of nice clothes and her amusing greediness when Jane prepared any dish of which she was particularly fond. He missed her fair curls, her lovely skin, her bright eyes and beautiful figure.

The education which he had worked to give her, her music lessons, her taste for clothes—taste which he had cultivated so carefully, training her to buy things which were quiet, distinctive and really good, in preference to those which were cheap and flashy—all those things had gone for nothing. He, Louis, had lost the game to a creature who called himself Lennox—Le Roy Lennox!

He never asked if his mother or David had heard from her, and once when Jane said tentatively, "I 'ad a nice letter from our Marge this morning . . ." he turned on her with a face of fury, saying that he neither wanted to see the letter nor hear what it contained.

II

The year was drawing to its close. Louis Silver, wearing a heavy Melton overcoat, sat with his bank manager discussing his various investments.

"They've turned out pretty well, Mr. Silver." Then, with a laugh, "But so do most of your ventures."

Louis nodded. "Yes—have you never heard that all Jews are lucky?"

"I never really think of you as a Jew——"

"No? I am sure that you will admit that I possess all the traits of the less pleasant type of Hebrew."

The little, round-faced manager laughed. Queer fellow, Silver was. He supposed that last remark had been made as a joke. Surely no one really and seriously believed themselves to be unpleasant. Not that Silver was actually unpleasant; he was merely cynical, hard and exacting. He never expanded in the least, seemed to have no friends except that old drunkard "Bert" Fosdick. He lived somewhere with a brother who was in Benson's and his mother. There had been a sister—a lovely girl. She seemed to have gone; married possibly.

Louis said, "Then, that's all. We'll get rid of the

"Tranversed", and put the money into Calver's Restaurants. Food invariably pays."

"I have a note of that. Well, good-bye, Mr. Silver."

Louis walked home; he moved swiftly, making his way easily through the crowds of Christmas shoppers, contriving to avoid bumping or being bumped. He disliked his fellow creatures in the mass, and went out of his way a little to avoid the crowds. In the smaller, less brightly lit streets he slackened his pace a little.

He had gone through a trying day, doing his best to persuade Fosdick to sell the shops to a great multiple stores who were willing to pay a price which was almost fantastic. Fosdick had been difficult. He had never shown the slightest interest in the shops, and now, when the opportunity came to sell, he appeared to resent Louis' suggestion that they should accept the offer. That morning, at the warehouse, Louis had argued forcibly; he had accompanied Fosdick to the "Grand", and, while his employer imbibed a considerable number of double whiskies, continued to press his point. "It's a first-rate offer. We ought to take it. We've had the cream of the trade. We began as a novelty. Now fruit is easier to get, plenty of chromium plate makes the cheapest place look attractive. Other people have copied us. We're unique no longer. Get out and leave Donnerton's to hold the baby."

Fosdick blinked, banged the marble-topped table with his fist, talked wildly of profits and losses, of throwing their assistants out of work—"for Donnerton's always provide their own people"—and brought up a dozen reasons, both financial and philanthropic, why Fosdick's should continue their retail trade.

Louis listened with patience. He suggested luncheon, to which Fosdick agreed.

He was determined to get rid of the shops; he was tired of them and of his own barrows. They took up too much of his time; he no longer wished to be worried over

details—could no longer spare the time to go round inspecting plums, oranges and vegetables. He was sick to death of evolving new stunts to catch business.

He ordered a good claret. Fosdick, hiccuping a little, said, "Or' right; 'affer whisky?"

Louis nodded, smiling. "Of course!" Later he asked affectionately after the health of some port which he heard had been introduced on the wine list. The waiter beamed, rubbed his hands, and grew lyrical over its quality.

"I should like to try a bottle—if it's all you say——"

"And more, sir, and *more*, believe me."

Fosdick said, "Whass'is? Port. Dangerous stuff, port. 'Ve not tasted any f'years. Lessh have some."

Fosdick consumed most of the bottle, gravely complimenting Louis on his good taste. Louis, smiling and pleasant, said, "And to—round off this luncheon, I think a good brandy, eh?"

"Yer're paying fr it, my boy. Yesh, why not?"

Louis agreed. "Oh, of course, my luncheon. I've had so many with you. You've paid for quite a lot of my meals, one way and another, eh?"

"One way an' 'nuther," Fosdick said. "Goo' brandy, thish. Might I trouble you, Schilver, f'nuther? I thank yer."

It was then that Louis produced the contract, and his own fountain-pen, saying as he did so, "Just sign this, will you, while we're waiting for the other brandies? I'm sorry that I opposed you about the selling of the shops. You've been at this game longer than I have, and I ought to have remembered that. You may be—in fact, I am sure you're right. We've had the cream of the business; people want novelty; well, let Donnerton's give it to them."

"Let Donnerton gie it to 'em," Fosdick repeated. "Thash right. Never 'ppose me, Schilver. Old head—clever old devil, Bert Fosdick." He blinked his red-

rimmed eyes and said, trying to speak clearly, "But—did I shiny we'd shell? S'me idea that wash you; s'me idea you shed shell, an' I shed—do'n' shell."

"Come"—Louis laughed—"don't try to make me believe that you don't know what you said. Ah, waiter, another brandy. That's where you sign—yes, just there. A. Fosdick—"

"All ri', all ri'—know how ter schign wi'out yer tellin' me. Schigned hun'ds, thousands, millions o' theshe things— Leo' there--fine, clear sig'ture. Old hand never shakes, never. Where'sh brandy?"

Witnesses, that was easy enough. Couple of men at the warehouse. "In the presence of . . . —just bunk, that! Fosdick never remembered anything, and the warehouse hands were here today and gone tomorrow. The whole thing was settled; Fosdick had gone home in a taxi-cab to sleep off the effects of the luncheon, and Louis Silver had given all necessary instructions for the transfer.

He walked along, smiling a little. The barrows would have to go. Old Turner and Smith and the two ex-soldiers would be worried; it was not likely that Donnerton's would allow anyone to contrive to keep on the barrows. These big firms avoided leakage. Well, the barrow-men weren't his concern. He'd done pretty well out of the business—now he was tired of it. The next thing should be the warehouse, and the street-corner betting—not that it was entirely street-corner business now. He'd given it a lift in the world! They made nearly all transactions by telephone, were registered and even advertised in the better-class sporting papers. He might keep on the bookmaking—move into smarter premises—offer David the manager's job; with his head for figures he ought to do well. pity David was so set on respectability, and this lawyer stuff. He'd never get far there. Managing for Severn and Beaman—the name under which the business was run—he could

make double the money. Queer fellow, David was, with his Gracie and her family. All so damn' dull, too.

Louis let himself into the house in Longland's Road, thinking, 'We might move in the New Year. Let David have this for his Gracie and her mother. Shouldn't care to live with a mother-in-law myself! Now the old father's dead, I suppose they could be married. I'll think it over.'

As he slipped out of his heavy coat David came into the little hall. He laid his hand on Louis' shoulder and spoke softly.

"Loo, something's happened. We heard a few minutes ago. You've got to face it ; it's pretty bad. Don't let Mum get more upset than she is."

Quick as lightning, Louis rapped out, "It's Marjorie."

David nodded. "Come in ; Mum will tell you."

Mum sat by the fire, the tears running down her cheeks, rocking herself backwards and forwards. Louis went to her, saying, "Now, Jane dear. This won't do. Tell me all about it."

Without speaking, she handed him a telegram. He read it, leaning so that the light fell full on the pink sheet. His face was very white ; David thought that he looked like a dead man ; only his eyes were alive.

Please come take me home very ill alone Lennox left me love Marjorie.

Louis' voice broke the silence.

"Oh, he's left her, has he? It's sent from Manchester. I'll go."

Mum sobbed suddenly. "Oh, Loo dear. You'll be kind to 'er, won't you?"

He looked down at her, his face still unmoved. "Of course, there is no reason—now—for me to be anything else. I'll pack a bag. David, look out a train for me, will you?"

David drove with him to the station. Louis talked quickly, and very clearly.

"Luckily I put through the business which I had in hand today. Telephone to the office ; say that I shall be back as soon as possible. Get on to the Garden Road shop tonight. Cohen lives over it. Tell him to take over at the warehouse tomorrow. Get on to Fosdick—explain what's happened. That's all—wait ! Tell Cohen—the one in the S.P.—that I've some information about Carr's horse—yes, C-A-double-R—he's to lay off every penny he can, and close Frank Murr's account—M-U-L-R. That's all, I think. I'll send a telegram as soon as I know anything. Thanks for everything ; you've been a tremendous help."

The journey to Manchester seemed endless. He huddled in a corner of the carriage, his coat-collar turned up about his ears, trying to fight down the fear which threatened to overcome the hope which, at intervals, sprang up in his heart.

Marjorie was coming home. He could make good all those promises which he had made to himself. The house would be bright again ; he would be able to have someone near him who gave him the beauty for which he longed. She would forget Lennox ; he would arrange for a divorce ; he'd make the swine pay if it cost him a thousand pounds ! He would take a holiday, get Marjorie away to the South of France, to the sunshine. Sunshine was good for everyone when they'd been ill. He'd get a car, drive her about, buy clothes for her. She'd once said that she wanted a diamond wrist-watch. He'd laughed and told her that diamonds were for rich folks. Well, if she still wanted one she should have it—she should have anything she wanted.

Then, as the night wore on, his hopes sank. How ill was she ? What was wrong with her ? Where was the house ? Mum had scribbled the address on a bit of paper : twenty-seven Risley Street, Oxford Road. It

appeared that Mum had heard from Marjorie less than a week ago. She said nothing then about Lennox leaving her. "Only," Mum said, "her letters haven't been so happy for a good time now, Loo."

He said, "You ought to have told me—either you or David."

"Now, Loo dear," she chided him gently, "didn't you say as neither David nor me was to so much as mention 'er name?"

"I suppose so—well, it can't be helped now."

She sighed. "Nay, it's no use of crying over spilt milk."

III

A long, grey road, looking cold and unfriendly in the dim light of the early morning. Grim-faced houses, with little front gardens crowded with dingy laurel bushes. As the taxi-cab stopped, a cat sprang up from the pavement and disappeared through the railings, giving one furtive glance as it leapt. Louis scanned the windows; no lights burning. Surely if Marjorie were very ill they would have kept a light burning all night?

He pushed open the gate, walked up the path, where worn tiles rocked under his feet. The door-step needed washing, the brass letter-box had been painted with some kind of varnish to obviate the necessity of cleaning, the varnish was peeling off at the edges. He pressed the bell, and heard it ringing in the distance, ringing with that peculiar tone which indicates that no one is stirring in the house. Everyone still in bed, and at eight in the morning! Then she was better!

Again he rang; footsteps could be heard clattering down the stairs; the door opened; a woman, blinking the sleep from her eyes, stared at him, confused and stupid.

Louis said, "My sister—Mrs. Lennox? How is she?"

"Oh——" The sound was half exclamation, half yawn. "She's not 'ere. They take 'er off to the 'ospital las' night. Oh, she were far over-bad for me to look after 'er. I've got a 'ouseful of pro.'s mister. Oh, I could never 'ave kep' 'er 'ere."

He leaned back against the wall, suddenly feeling weak and sick.

"What was wrong?" he asked.

"Wrong? Oh, with 'er? Double noomonin. Yes, that's right, double noomonin. Oh, very bad, too, pore thing. W're's the 'ospital? It's in Ann Road; that's right, Ann Road. It's a tidy way from 'ere. You might pick up a taxi-cab i' Oxford Road."

"Ann Road Hospital," Louis repeated. "Thank you. I'll get along."

The woman, who had been gently swinging herself backwards and forwards by the handle of the door, became still. Her eyes brightened, and for the first time a glimmer of intelligence met Louis' eyes.

"There's a bit owin'," she said. "Couple o' weeks, to be exact. I 'ave the bill made out—or could 'ave it' five minutes. I'd like it settled, if it's all the same to you, mister."

Panic seized him. Here he was wasting time, losing moments which might be employed in getting him to Marjorie. He dragged out his note-case, pulled out a treasury note and handed it to her.

"I suppose her clothes and things are still here?" His voice was almost as crisp and businesslike as usual, only his heart's beating made even tones difficult. "Very well. Take that pound. I'll come back and settle the bill and collect her clothes later."

A crawling taxi-cab, a driver with a hoarse voice, repeating, "H'ann Road 'Ospital. Yes, I know it."

Louis sat forward, his hands on his knees, straining, as if by his own physical effort he could force the car to move more quickly. Little beads of sweat stood on his

forehead, and yet he shivered with cold. Double pneumonia! That was what had attacked her. It was both dangerous and painful. He wondered what people said when they asked favours from God. He remembered some of the prayers he had learnt at school; he'd never entered a church since then. 'Our Father, which art in heaven . . . we sinners do beseech Thee . . . two or three are gathered together in Thy name. . . .' Two or three—here there was only himself; you couldn't count on the co-operation of the driver!

The taxi turned through some large open gates, gravel crunched under the wheels, they stopped. Louis flung himself out, paid the fare and entered the hospital. The place smelt faintly of disinfectant. A man was polishing the floor with a heavy felt contraption which he pushed backwards and forwards. He wore a striped linen jacket. For a moment Louis stared round him. He felt as if he had been running and must wait to regain his breath. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. A short fellow in uniform came forward. "Did you want someone?"

"My sister—came in yesterday—last night—Mrs. Lennox."

"Did we send for you?"

"No—I mean yes. Well, my sister telegraphed for me."

"I see." He went back to his little glass office and pored over some lists. As if he were looking up a train, Louis thought. Why didn't they have some system of obtaining immediate information?

The man jerked his head in its peaked cap and said, "That's right—Mrs. Le Roy Lennox, Ward H." He glanced up from his papers. "There's the night sister from Ward H coming through now. There, that one. I'll just—"

Louis said, "I'll speak to her! Stay where you are." The woman held some books and lists in her hands; she

was tall and stout, with large front teeth and pale, frizzy hair.

He said, "How is my sister—Mrs. Lennox—please?"

She repeated, "Mithis Lennox—who are you, pleath?"

He answered impatiently, "I'm her brother—obviously. *How is she?*"

The nurse opened large grey-green eyes, wriggled her shoulders slightly under her wide apron-bands, and said, "Pleath don't thpeak to me like that. I think it will be wither if you thee the matron."

His last remnants of control snapped; he was exhausted, his head felt light, his eyes seemed to be burning in his head. He caught her by the arm, pressing his fingers into the soft flesh, staring into her eyes, his face distorted with fury.

"Tell me how she is, do you hear?" he ordered. "By God, if you don't I'll go and find out for myself! How is she, d'you hear?"

She twisted herself loose from his grasp. The uniformed man came out of his office, saying, "Here, here, this won't do at all; not at all it won't."

Louis, shaking and ghastly, muttered, "I beg your pardon——"

"Your thither"—the nurse spoke slowly—"your thither died half an hour ago."

She turned and walked away, her starched apron rustling, her rubber-heeled shoes making a curious padding sound on the polished floor. Louis stood, his hands hanging at his sides, his eyes unseeing. "Died half an hour ago." Died while he was talking to the drab woman with eyes still dull with sleep, while he was listening to the fact that Marjorie owed two weeks' rent.

The porter touched his arm. "Sit down for a minute. She didn't ought to have told you that way, say what you like. Not right."

Louis said, "Thanks, I'll sit down," and allowed himself to be helped to a bench by the wall. He sat down, his head in his hands, trying to realize the full import of what he had heard. Marjorie was dead; he must take her home, back to Jane and David and the house she had left so that she might marry Le Roy Lennox. He had said that she could come home if she came alone. She was coming alone. He had kept his word.

He thought, 'I can't sit here for ever. I must do something. There must be forms to fill in, money to pay—undertakers—trains—oh, God, it's not possible.'

"The matron will see you if you'll come this way."

He lifted his head, frowned as if he had to force himself back to reality, and followed a woman in uniform down a long corridor. People passed; he wondered if they, too, had come too late; if they felt as he did, stunned and confused. Once a young man, walking briskly, wearing a white coat, hurried along, giving Louis a quick glance as he passed.

The woman in uniform stopped. "The matron will see you in here."

He nodded and entered the room—an office, with a big desk, a gas-fire, filing cabinets and letter-racks. A gaunt woman sat in a swivel chair; at her side stood the sister with the long front teeth. Louis shivered again. Not overcrowded with humanity, this place. The women were like horses. He longed to get away—to take Marjorie with him.

The matron said, "You are Mrs. Lennox's brother?"

Louis nodded. "Yes."

"I realize that it must be a great shock to you. I am deeply sorry. Sister tells me that she felt the case to be hopeless from the first." She shot a glance at the woman who stood at her side, asking for confirmation.

"Yeth, Matron, I felt tho from the first. Under-nourished, I thought."

"Ah. It is very sad, and she was quite young?"

His voice sounded too loud, brutal and matter-of-fact : "Not quite nineteen."

"Ah, very young. And married?"

"And married."

"You live in Manchester? No? You wish to take your sister's body home? Yes, I understand. There will be certain formalities—certain papers for your signature. Shall we say that you will arrange to leave tomorrow—tomorrow morning? Believe me, your sister had everything done for that her was possible. Sister here is one of my most efficient nurses; she is . . ."

He thought, "That's because I pinched the brute's arm. She may be efficient; I swear she's got no heart." He said, coldly and stiffly, "I will arrange to move my sister's body"—it was a horrible effort to say that coully—"as soon as possible. I should like to make a donation to the hospital. I don't know what a cot costs—or a bed—perhaps you will give me particulars—"

"That is very kind, most generous."

Louis said, "I have never been either." He went back to Risley Street. He saw that Marjorie's clothes were packed, noted the worn photograph frames which held his photograph and those of Jane and David. He saw a large portrait of Lennox, and deliberately tore it into shreds. The landlady clicked her tongue sympathetically.

"Oli, I don't wunner as you do that, mister. 'E wera 'ere for a bit. A nice life 'e led that pore young girl; never gave 'er——"

Louis shouted suddenly, "Be quiet, damn you!"

"Oh, sorry, I'm sure."

She was kindly enough; brought him up a cup of strong tea, with the liquid slopping into the saucer, and asked if he'd like a "bit o' cake" to eat with it. He refused the cake, but drank the tea eagerly, realizing that he had eaten nothing for nearly twenty-four hours.

"Could I have another cup of tea? I'm thirsty. It's cold here, isn't it?"

She looked at him closely. He might have the airs of a grown man, but she doubted if he was so old after all. White-faced fellow, with those dark eyes with the great black rings round them. He looked properly cut up over his sister. No wonder, and her only nineteen—scarcely nineteen, she'd said. "I'm only nineteen, Mrs. Morley; well, scarcely nineteen. I was only married in August this year. It's not turned out very well, I'm afraid."

She said, "Come on down to my kitchen, there's a good fire there. I won't talk to you if you'd rather be quiet. No one's in, barring the pro's, an' they're just going off to the theatre. They eat when they come back. There's only my Johnnie, an' 'e's quiet enough, God knows."

The kitchen was warm, the hot tea was warming, and Johnnie, a shock-haired lad, sat at one end of the table, putting some white powder into packets, working steadily, scarcely ever raising his eyes.

"My Johnnie's putting up his patent washer for tomorrow," the woman said. "It's 'is own invention. Oughter be on the market, didn't it, Johnnies ducks?"

"Where's the brass comin' from," Johnnie growled. "Most I can do's ter sell packets at doors. It's goodish stuff an' all."

Louis, feeling slack and uninterested, said idly, "Invent it yourself? How did you come to do that?" He didn't want to know, only it seemed merely civil to take an apparent interest.

The shock-haired lad's face brightened; he began to talk rapidly.

"It were this way. I were workin' at Culton's—yer know Culton's Patent Cleanser and Washing Powder?—aye. Well, I worked there. One o' t'chemists were a pal of mine; 'e told me the formula. Simple enoof; all these things are simple. That's how fortunes is made! I reckoned it out that by putting in a bit more o'—well, o' one ingredient, an' less o' another, powder cleansed

a lot quicker and were better for the clothes. I said this to my pal ; 'e laughed. 'E said I was right, but—but—if you do that,' 'e said, 'you'll use a lot less—that is wimmen who's doing the washing will. The packets 'ud be that small they'd think they were gettin' nothing for their money.' See ? Well, I lost my job. Colton cut down the staff. I couldn't get work, so I set in to mak' the stool on my own. That's what I did. I peddle it round the 'ouses. Some buys it reg'lar. I mak' about a pound a week, don't I, Ma ?"

Louis' face had lost some of its indifference. He sat upright, frowning, listening intently. Mrs. Morley, busily peeling potatoes for the late suppers of the actors and actresses, thought that she'd been wrong in imagining that he was so young after all.

He said, "Let me have a couple of packets. Oh, I won't steal it from you. How much is it ? Sixpence a packet? You could do it cheaper if you had a quantity to make, eh ? Small factory—how many men working ? A dozen ? I'll write to you when I've gone into the matter. Meanwhile, don't chatter, or the possible—only *possible*, mind I—deal is off."

Late that night he left Manchester. They had talked of "tomorrow", but Louis had galvanized everyone into action, and people had accomplished what they had first sworn was impossible. His bitter tongue, his readiness to pay if his conditions were complied with, made it possible for him to travel back to Melbrough that night ; to sit, his hat tilted over his eyes, his mouth grim, reflecting on the futility of the plans which he had made for Marjorie barely thirty hours ago.

Once he backed a laugh, "And I actually tried to remember some prayers !"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Louis suffered acutely after his sister's death; suffered because he had loved her, because his plans for her had come to nothing, because, again and again, the statement that she had been undernourished returned to flicker through his mind like some dark ghost. He never told either David or his mother. That was his secret, something which he kept locked in his own heart.

It was not that he blamed himself. It never occurred to him to consider that he might have supplied Marjorie with sufficient money to buy food which would have nourished that slender body he had so loved and admired. He blamed some malignant fate, he blamed Lennox, never himself. He had made his offer—"Come home without your husband, and I will look after you." She had chosen to refuse, to remain with the man she had married. Very well, the blame was hers, not her brother's.

It likewise never occurred to him to ask his mother and David how much they had contributed to help Marjorie; that was their business. He did not ask them to subscribe one penny to the expenses of the funeral or to the cost of the bed which he endowed in the name of "Marjorie Silver". These were obligations which he had taken on himself; he shouldered them, speaking of them to no one, giving no information concerning them.

Early in the New Year Bert Fosdick had a stroke. He was standing talking to Louis in the warehouse when Louis noticed that he was making odd grimaces. For a moment he fancied that Fosdick was trying to warn him

of the approach of some customer, indicating that he was to speak carefully. There were always certain people before whom the partners chose their words with discretion. They had so many irons in the fire, there were so many small intrigues concerned with the business, that it was advisable to trust no one—except themselves.

Fosdick used to say, "I trust no one—barring meself an' you."

Louis Silver preferred his own silent amendment: "I trust no one—except myself."

He glanced round to see the reason for Fosdick's grimaces, saw no one, and, when he turned back, a question on his lips, the elder man was slipping to the dusty floor, his face distorted and purple. Louis shouted for two of the porters; they got him into a taxi and Louis drove back with him to his big, ugly house.

For days he lay without moving. Louis watched him with undivided attention. Would he ever emerge from that stupor? Would that swollen right hand ever again be able to sign the scrawled signature, "A. Fosdick"? If he died, what will had he made, where was it, to whom would his money go?

Louis spent most of his days with Fosdick, sitting motionless in the big dark room, with its heavy curtains and over-elaborate furniture. For hours the silence would be unbroken except by the astertorous breathing of the sick man. Louis hated illness; he loathed the stuffy room, the chattering maids, who giggled when his back was turned, and who fled to do his bidding when he addressed them. He would not go home, he scarcely slept, and whenever business called him to the warehouse he drove there and back in a taxi which he kept waiting for him.

After ten days Fosdick stirred, mumbling something which brought Louis to his side. He bent over him, trying to disregard the smell of stale sweat, and bed-linen which was not too clean.

"Yes—here I am"; his voice was very clear and distinct.

Fosdick's dull eyes roved wildly, then came to anchor as they met Louis'.

"Schilver—'t'you?"

"It's me. You're better!"

"Berrer—not—well."

"We'll soon have you well. I'll look after you."

"Goo' lad, Schilver, goo' lad."

The doctor, young, smart and more interested in the girl to whom he was engaged, his smart new car, and his bridge, found Bert Fosdick a boring case. He preferred something more spectacular, or a case where a pretty woman was his patient. He visited the old man, made brisk statements, wrote prescriptions rapidly, ripped them neatly off his pad, and went his way, glad to be out of the gloomy house.

One morning, before he went upstairs, Louis stopped him in the hall.

"Ah, Doctor, a word with you, if you please."

The doctor paused, one foot on the bottom stair. Good-looking fellow Silver was, yet something of a mystery man. People talked quite a lot about him, but no one seemed to know much about him. They said that he was rich, that he was unscrupulous, that he was a Jew.

"A dozen, if you wish."

"Will Mr. Fosdick recover?"

"Oh, we-e-ell." Wilmington drew down the corners of his mouth, shrugged his shoulders. "Recover—I doubt it. I imagine that the life he's led isn't conducive to recovery. You're his partner—?"

"And"—with grave decision—"his friend."

"Yes, yes, I'm certain of it—" Queer chap, suddenly speaking in that grave voice, almost emotional. That was the Jew coming out in him, no doubt. It made one feel vaguely uncomfortable; probably the fellow wasn't out of the top drawer. "Well, I'm afraid that I can't give you much hope, Mr. Silver."

"Ah!" The lids were half lowered over the dark eyes, the smooth head a little bowed. "But"—the voice was devoid of all emotion now—"he is perfectly conscious? He knows exactly what he is doing?"

"Yes—to a point. That is, his consciousness comes and goes. Brain clears, then clouds over. Bit of an effort for him to speak clearly, I imagine. Plenty of will-power."

"I see. He wants to make his will; is that all right?"

"Perfectly, I should say. I'll see how he is this morning and let you know."

Louis said, "He gave me all the details last night. But I would rather you satisfied yourself, because—as a matter of fact, he's got no relatives; he wants to leave everything to me. He"—again that queer grave note—"is fond of me."

"Really—I mean, I don't doubt it; you've been very good to the old boy. Got much to leave?"

Louis pursed his lips. "Not nearly so much as he thinks. He's always imagined that he was a millionaire, or something very like it."

"Umph. Well, so long as you don't witness the will, do something irregular and complicate matters for yourself—"

"I shan't do that, believe me."

That night Louis telephoned to David, "Come up and do something for me. It's urgent. Bring a portable typewriter."

In the big dining-room he dictated to his brother from notes written on a half-sheet of note-paper.

"Fosdick gave me these yesterday. I want you to make out a regular will. He's worried about it. To have it sealed and signed might ease his mind. So long as it's in the proper form I don't suppose it matters whether it's on your stiff legal paper or not, does it?"

As David tapped the words out on the typewriter Louis walked, treading softly, up and down the long

room. His voice was very low, very clear and distinct, his face inscrutable.

"The warehouse, the business of Severn and Berman, all investments to come to me. The house is to be mine also. Heaven only knows what the poor old boy thinks I want with it. Ten pounds to each of the maids, and the sum of one hundred to Ellen Green—I wish to God he'd leave that out!—She is the little shifty-eyed maid. Then there is . . ." and the clear voice continued, until finally he came and sat down beside David, saying, "And that's the lot. Get it done as quickly as possible, David. He won't rest until it's signed."

Bert Fosdick signed his will late that night, and at the same time scrawled his signature at the foot of several other documents relating to unimportant business matters. Louis had proffered one after another, leaning down and saying urgently, "Now this one—yes, it's only about some fruit, and—now this—and then here. That's all."

The old man puffed, sweated and breathed heavily, but the documents were all signed. Louis slipped the fountain-pen back into his pocket, laid Fosdick down and went out, closing the door softly. Two men, Smith and Turner, were waiting in the dining-room.

"Ah, you've come at an opportune moment," Louis said cordially.

Smith said, "Come ter say good-bye, and thanks for yer kindness in getting me taken on at Carver's."

"Only too glad to have been able to help. I think you'll like Leicester. It's a fine town. And you, Turner—"

Turner twisted his cap in his hands. "Never forget what you've done, Mr. Silver. Allus had trouble wi' me chest since I lef' the Army. They say as Devon's the very place for weakish chests. It sounds a likely little job too. I've always wanted ter have a little 'baccy an' newspaper shop."

Louis laughed. "See that you make a success of it. Keep your accounts straight, and I'll send someone down from time to time to keep an eye on how things are going. Mind, it's got to pay, Turner!" He shook hands with both the men, then as an afterthought said, "Ah, while you're here just put your names to these documents, will you? They're papers regarding the selling of some stock—it's only quite a formal business. Not swearing away your souls or anything."

"Not likely to be that, sir."

"You'd not arst us to do that; we know you too well, sir."

They both scrawled their names, sticking their tongues out because writing did not come easily to them.

"Then—good-bye and good luck to you both."

If

Albert Fosdick died two days later. Louis returned home after the funeral; he looked white-faced and tired. Jane confided to David that losing his friend had cut him up badly.

She said to him that night, "You mustn't take it too hard, Leo."

He looked up, stared at her, his face blank. "Take—what?"

"This losing Mr. Fosdick—"

"Oh—no, I won't."

"I know coming so soon after losing our darling Marjorie—"

"We won't talk about that, Jane, please."

"All right, dearie—"

Albert Fosdick left eighty thousand pounds. The town whispered about his legacy to the little shifty-eyed servant girl, Ellen Green, and there were men who lunched at the "Grand" who asked Louis if that was the only legacy

he had been obliged to pay. They sniggered as they said it, and Louis met their amused eyes coldly.

"That is the only legacy mentioned in the will," he said.

"What about the others—private instructions?" Vernon, the traveller for Mostock's Brewery, asked.

"Those are my business, surely—not that I admit their existence."

When he had gone they nudged each other, said that Silver was a damn' sight too superior, gave himself too many airs, didn't want to admit how much of his legacy had gone to Fosdick's women. One man made the statement that Silver was close—all Jews were.

"Is he a Jew? By gad, I never knew that!"

"You've only got to look at him!"

"That's why he got the needle about paying out the dough to a crowd of tarts! B'God, I bet that rankles."

At home Louis Silver smiled. What mugs they were! His sprat to Ellen Green had caught a whole shoal of mackerel. Still smiling, he figured out his assets. There were his own investments, the warehouse—with Cohen at a salary which made it worth his while to remain honest; besides, Cohen knew that he couldn't play tricks with Louis Silver—the bookmaking business—"Money" Cohen was a bright fellow, keen and able to hold his own—and now eighty thousand pounds!

The little factory where Silver's Washing Powder was to be produced had opened a week ago. Already the slogan "Silver's is worth its weight in gold" appeared on the hoarding in many south-country towns. Louis smiled as he stared at the total amount of his capital. "And I am twenty-four! Now I might begin to allow myself a little relaxation."

As an afterthought he added, "I've earned it."

He went about his business; he confided in no one. Once people knew your business they attempted to make it theirs. Slowly and carefully he began to make friends.

The County Club was tottering, funds were low ; the place was old-fashioned and dingy ; the younger men declared that it was a morgue. Old men wagged their heads and said that it was a terrible thing to see an institution—"for that's what the old Club is—an institution, almost a—damn it—a tradition!"—totter and fall.

The chairman, Colonel the Hon. George Chevour, sat with his friends night after night, drinking the admirable club port and discussing how funds might be raised.

One night he came with a queer story.

"Most astonishing thing ! Come a bit nearer, Crabtree, I don't want all and sundry to hear. Chap called to see me yesterday. Came up to Melford ; sent in his card—Louis Silver. Smooth, dark feller, with good clothes and a manner. Not in the least abashed at barging into my house. I asked him his business. He pulled up a chair and sat down ! Said, 'I hear the County Club is in low water.' I asked him what the devil it mattered to him. Said, 'I want to join it, and I'm prepared to pay for doing so.'

"God ! You could have knocked me down with a feather ! I told him, and pretty soundly, what I thought of his impertinence. Feller never turned a hair. Sat and listened, took out a cigarette-case and said, when I'd finished, 'May I smoke ?' Then he told me what his offer consisted of."

Frank Mellock, tall, heavy, and with dewlaps like an old bloodhound, said, "This offer—what was it ?"

Chevour emptied his glass, then stared round at the little group. He looked like some stag that has caught a whiff of the pursuing dogs.

"Membership—complete secrecy—and two thousand pounds."

"Secrecy about what ?" Major Tilney asked.

Chevour reflected that Jimmie Tilney had always been a fool. "About the two thousand pounds !" he snapped.

Mellock and Waldon spoke almost simultaneously ;

the former said, "I hope to God that you kicked the little brute"; the latter, "Well, I propose that we see him."

Tilney muttered, "By Jove!" and rang the bell for the waiter. For hours they argued, for and against. The offer was a gross impertinence or it was a very sound proposition. The man Silver was clearly a cad, or he was a person who knew his own mind, and possibly quite a good fellow. The upshot of it all was that Chevour instructed Glennister Mason to write to Louis Silver and ask him to call and see the committee.

Louis read the letter, smiled, and went down the town to interview a property agent with a view to buying Carrick Grange.

The appointed evening came. Dressed with his usual quiet care, Louis presented himself at the County Club, noting the grim entrance hall, the time-stained ceiling, and the shabby uniform of the hall porter. These, among many other things, should be changed.

Before the committee his bearing was admirable. He stated his case, said that he had been fairly successful, that he wished to join a club, and—with a smile that disclosed his white even teeth—added, "There is, gentlemen, only one club which I should wish to join. I am prepared to pay for the privilege on condition that no mention of my offer is made outside this room."

Tilney said, "You said two thousand, didn't you?"

"Two thousand—" Louis made a little gesture with his well-kept hands. "I should not wish to limit the committee—within reason—I mean an extra couple of hundred . . ."

"You don't want to spoil the club for a ha'porth of tar?" Waldon suggested.

"Exactly." Louis' expression implied that the phrase was both novel and apt.

Looking round at the grave faces of the committee, he could have burst into sudden laughter. What a fuss about nothing! Here he was making an offer which

would save their ridiculous old club, and they sat there debating in their minds as to whether it were possible or not to accept, because, in accepting, they were forced to accept Louis Silver ! Afraid that one man might pollute the atmosphere of their sacred fortress, which they had held so long against the onslaughts of the middle classes.

Georges Chevour bent forward, his face pucker'd with anxiety.

"Mr. Silver, I take it that you would not wish to take any part of the—the—er—executive administration of the club ? Not, in any way, interfere with its—er—its policy?"

Again that very ready smile. "Certainly not—I'm far too busy."

Tilney ejaculated, "Ah !" in a loud, ringing voice.

They would write to him, they said ; in a week he should know their decision. Their faces were heavy with thought, their foreheads pucker'd with anxiety. Louis Silver alone appeared to regard the matter as nothing particularly serious. He bade them good night, walked back again through the gloomy hall and down the wide granite steps into the street.

That night Jane found him less absorbed than he had been for weeks. He listened to David's account of some deal which his office had put through. He smiled at his mother's description of the daily woman's shortcomings, and finally, leaning back in his chair, gave them his news.

"I've bought Carrick—or rather I shall have bought it by next week."

David whistled, "Whew ! Bit risky ; those big houses don't let as they used to."

"I don't wish to let it. I'm going to live in it." Then to his mother, "You'll come with me, Jane ? David can have this house and marry his young woman as soon as he likes."

Her face showed her astonishment ; she was half dismayed.

"Loo dear—Carrick, why it's got 'undreds of bed-rooms ; it 'ul take a army of servants to keep it right. My dear, I 'ad thought you might go an' live at Mr. Fosdick's 'ouse, but—Carrick!"

"Live at Fosdick's! Good heavens—that dust-heap! No, that's being converted into flats. They'll be attractive little places—ought to let well. Carrick will want a certain amount doing to it ; it will take time, but it's a pleasant place."

How full of assurance he was ! He might have been able to buy places like Carrick all his life !

"You're a funny chap," David said. "D'you know they call you 'the mystery man' in the town? Only today a man told me that you were a Jew. That was where you got your brains from. That silly old yarn!"

Louis laughed softly. "My dear David, let them think and say what they like. I prefer to remain a mystery. Let's hope that no one ever finds the solution!"

In a month Louis and his mother had left Longland's Road ; David was married to his Gracie and installed in the house which the local papers noted in the wedding report as "No. 34 Longland's Road—from the mother of the bridegroom to the happy pair". Jane felt that days flew past before she realized that they were upon her ; she lived in a whirl of excitement and slight apprehension. Louis told her nothing, confided nothing in David. How much money had he ? What were these mysterious visits to a factory ? Was he joking when he pointed out the slogan "Silver's is worth its weight in gold" and said, "There is one of the secrets of my untold wealth, Jane dear"? He was continually surprising her.

"I am going down to the club ; I may be late."

"Are you a member of the Liberal Club, Leo ? I never knew that."

"I'm not. I belong to the County Club, Jane."

Then again, when he came downstairs wearing a lovely new suit with silk facings and long tails, a white

waistcoat, and carrying a light coat on his arm, he looked like one of those gentlemen you saw in illustrated papers.

"Loo!" she almost screamed. "Whatever are you dressed up like that for?"

"I'm dining at Pettingly."

"Pettingly? Where Sir 'Arry Waldon lives?"

Louis nodded. "I'm dining with him. Good night, Jane, and don't wait up for me."

III

'My first dinner-party in a house like this,' Louis thought as the car which had once been Bert Fosdick's carried him up the long avenue to Pettingly House. He wondered if he were nervous, and decided that he was—but only faintly; not of old Harry Waldon, nothing to make one nervous there. He was a kindly old fellow, with more sense, if less money, than some of the old fogies at the club. Not that any of them were rolling in wealth these days. They were for ever grumbling about farms which wouldn't let, tithes which were not paid, death duties and the money which old houses needed spending on them. A dull lot they were, with their insane gravity about things that didn't matter a damn, and their disregard of essentials.

Tilney had said only two days ago, "Y've no idea what a drain a big place is—can't afford to live in 'em."

"But," Louis said softly, "you *do* live in one."

"'Course I do—y'know my place, don't yer? Tilney Manor."

"Yes, yes, but you said that in these days no one could afford to live in these big houses. But you *do* live in one."

"Good God, man, I've got to live somewhere!"

"A smaller house—let Tilney. It's historic, beautiful."

"*Let Tilney!* Great Scott, d'yer know we've lived at Tilney since 1492! *Let Tilney!*"

Waldon had laughed about his poverty; drank his port, sipped his good old brandy, and laughed.

"Don't know what 'ul happen to anyone when I've gone. There won't be a penny, or if there happens to be an odd one or two the Government will get it. I've told m'daughter. She quite understands. She'll have to marry well. I've spent a fortune—one which I hadn't got—on her education. She's got every accomplishment under the sun. She'll have to look round her and do the best she can for herself! Come and dine and meet her, Silver." Then again that great rolling laugh. "Damn it, that invitation coming on the heels of my other statements sounds distinctly bad, eh? Never mind—come and dine just the same."

Now he had come to dine, and a staid, stout man was helping him off with his light coat, and walking with him towards a closed door.

"Mr. Silver—"

The door swung open; Louis saw a long expanse of carpet with a sprawling design of roses and blue ribbons; he saw a tall girl rise from the seat at the piano and come to greet him.

"Mr. Silver—how do you do? My father is late; he is always late for everything. I'm Alicia Waldon."

He wanted to say, "You're Alicia Waldon, and you're the most lovely thing I've ever seen. You would make Carrick quite perfect."

Her voice was very smooth, without many inflections. Her face was a beautiful oval, without much colour, the skin almost creamy. Her eyes were large and grey—not the indeterminate colour which is so often called grey, but deep and definite. Her mouth was very red, artificially coloured, as were the nails of her white fingers. She was polished, certain of herself, tall and lovely.

Louis watched her intently as she talked, saying

nothing in particular, merely indulging in conventional conversation until such a time as her father should come down. Alicia Waldon! Where had he heard the name? When had he said, "It's an artificial kind of name"?

In his memory he heard a child's voice babbling away that she loved Alicia Waldon, loved watching her, and wouldn't it be wonderful if Louis could marry her some day? "Because you're the nicest boy and she's the loveliest girl I know."

Cornwall, the summer sea, white clouds, and Marjorie's hand in his.

He felt that someone had stabbed him; instinctively his hand was pressed over his heart.

Alicia Waldon said, "You're not ill, are you, Mr. Silver?"

"No, of course not. Why? Oh, I see—I was feeling to see that my cigarette-case was in my breast pocket. May I smoke?"

He firmly drove the thought away. The pain was too much; he never allowed himself to think of Marjorie. Whenever thoughts of her intruded there came the recollection of that drive to the hospital, when he had tried to remember some prayers; he could smell again the faint odour of disinfectant, feel his fingers closing on the fat arm of the night sister, hear the opinion given that Marjorie—his sister—had been undernourished.

That was all over; he was here at Pettingly, talking to this lovely girl, waiting for his host, Sir Harry Waldon—"Bart., Jane dear," he had said to her this evening, "not Knight"—with whom he was to dine. Everything was coming to him; he was going to enjoy life, get more and more rich. He was the Mystery Man—the man they believed to be a Jew. Well, what of it? That was exactly what he wished people to think. They were afraid of the Jews; afraid of their brains, ability and financial power. Louis Silver had no aversion to being ticketed "Jew".

He enjoyed his evening. He was a good listener; he

wished to learn all the tricks, to know how these people expressed themselves, to study their gestures and movements. They were text-books to him ! He only spoke when he realized that he possessed greater knowledge on some subject than either Alicia Waldon or her father.

He left fairly early ; when they protested he shook his head, pleading that he began work early. Alicia said that it surely wouldn't matter if he was late at his office—or whatever he had—just once.

That was the time to go, while they still pressed him to stay !

As Louis' car drove away, Waldon, his eyes dancing, turned back with his daughter into the drawing-room, and, pouring himself out another generous whisky-and-soda, said, "Not a bad fellow, eh, Alicia ?"

"I thought him rather charming. He's enchanting to look at, isn't he ?"

"I fancy a good many young women will come to that conclusion presently. He's only just beginning to go about." He raised his eyebrows and said, still smiling, "You—forgive my suggesting it—you might do worse, Alicia."

"You're late with your suggestion," she said coolly ; "the possibility had already occurred to me."

The following day Louis sent her some new books, which she had mentioned she had not read. His note, enclosed with them, was courteous without being effusive.

Alicia replied, asking him to come out to Pettingly again. If he rode, they would be delighted to mount him. Louis read the note, folded it and slipped it into his pocket-book, then made inquiries as to where he could have riding-lessons, immediately and intensively. The Saturday following he went over to Pettingly and, mounted on Sir Harry's great raking grey, rode with Alicia. He made fun of his own poor horsemanship ; she liked him for doing it.

"You don't really ride badly," she protested.

"With all your kindness of heart you can't say that I ride well!"

"What makes you imagine that I have a kind heart——?" she asked.

He laughed. "I thought that all women were supposed to have them."

"You can't know very much about women!"

"I have never wanted to. I don't want to know anything about them—in the mass, now."

"Oh, I see——" She shot a glance at him from those very dark-grey eyes. Their glances met; his lids were narrowed; he looked amused, provocative. Alicia said, "Shall we turn? Just touch him gently with that foot—very gently but firmly. He'll understand. Never saw at your reins too much."

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

Louis walked out through the long French windows and stood on the terrace of Carrick. He lit a cigarette, carefully embedded the burnt match in one of the old stone vases, for he loathed untidiness ; then, folding his arms on the balustrade, he let his gaze wander over the wide expanse of country which stretched before him.

The lawns, old, smooth, and beautifully kept, the great trees flinging their shade over the cropped grass, the carefully tended flower-beds—went to prove, without a doubt, that McBean was worth his salary. The sound of water splashing gently into a stone basin reached him ; so the fountain was working at last, making the gardens quite perfect. Beyond the gardens lay the parklands—he'd let the grazing quite well to Collins the butcher from Melbrough. In the distance he could see the glimmer of silver where the river went twisting through land which was his property.

Turning, he surveyed the house and terrace. He had always dreamed of a grass terrace ; it was so much more individual than stone flags or gravel. The old stone house, with its long windows, its air of serene dignity, pleased him. This was how he had always intended to live, in restrained luxury. Louis Silver would never make the mistake of living like a profiteer. That was one reason why he restricted himself to a popular make of car. To have bought a Rolls would have been to make everyone raise their eyebrows and say that to own one was the ambition of every "newly rich". Those were the mistakes he wished to avoid.

Waldon had a Rolls—seven years old too, but still

running smoothly ; young Francis Weatherly had bought one ; certainly he had not paid for it—but he could afford it, in all ways except the financial. His father was the tenth Baronet. What was permissible to these people would go a long way to damn Louis Silver, who had just managed to scrape into the County Club at a cost of two thousand pounds !

A maid, immaculate in her severe uniform, came out through the French window, announcing that breakfast was served. Louis nodded, rubbed out his cigarette, congratulating himself again that he had limited his male staff to a reliable butler and refused to import a footman. He disliked these secure, smooth and knowledgeable men-servants. They were the only people who made him feel ignorant and uncertain of himself.

The breakfast-room pleased him ; not too large, with white panelling, the table shining with well-polished silver and china. The delightful smell of fried bacon and kidneys reached him. He sat down and took up his letters, opening them swiftly and neatly with the long slim ivory cutter which was always laid by his plate.

'Would Mr. Silver dine, informally . . . ? Would Mr. Silver play tennis . . . ? Would Mr. Silver come to Lady Ganton's garden party on the sixth ? He tossed them aside ; his secretary could deal with them. Smiling, he picked up a fourth letter.

Dear Louis,

Will you come over this evening ? I know that it is short notice, but we surely know each other sufficiently well for us to fling conventionality—not the same thing as the conventions!—overboard. Kopuloff is coming over with Maud Ganton, and it is more than likely that he'll play. Do come and hear him !

Alicia.

He turned over the envelope. Sent by hand . . . she must have written it very early. It was only nine o'clock

now. He raised his eyebrows, his smile deepening. She really was coming quite half-way to meet him. Tonight might be an excellent opportunity to propose to her. There was no sense in wasting time. With a mistress, a mistress like Alicia Waldon, Carrick would be quite perfect. She must wear white or oyster; soft tones almost always. They suited her so much better than more vivid colours.

He rang for his secretary, rose and paced softly about the room, until the door opened and little Barnard, with his huge horn-rimmed glasses, entered, pencil and pad in hand.

"Good morning, Barnard."

"Good morning, Mr. Thilver"; he spoke with a faint lisp.

"Got the engagement pad? See if I can make these, and reply accordingly. Get Miss Waldon on the telephone for me, and find out something about a pianist—I dunno, he may be a violinist—called Kopuloff. Type out the particulars and let me have them before I leave for the office."

Barnard blinked through his thick lenses; his voice had taken on a quality which was almost reverent.

"Kopuloff—Mr. Thilver, he's the greatest pianist in the world, in his own line. He's going to play at Melkborough the evening after next—yeth, Friday night. He's billed all over the town—"

"Is he? I never look at the placards except to see if they've got good positions for Silver's Washer! You'd better get me a couple of seats; if you can, get decent ones. Care to get one for yourself, Barnard?"

The little man nearly dropped his pad and pencil, his mouth hung open. He looked, Louis thought, like a fish on a slab.

"Oh, Mr. Thilver—I meant to go in the gallery—I can't thank you—"

Louis stared at him, his eyes dancing with amusement.

The little secretary was almost in tears ; how could the prospect of hearing some music affect anyone so acutely ?

"Then don't thank me," Louis said ; "and go in the dress circle or whatever means a decent seat. Get mine as near the front as possible. If they are all sold, tout round and see if anyone will sell theirs."

Barnard slipped away, returning a moment later to report, "Miss Waldon on the 'phone."

Louis followed him slowly. He never hurried, and yet with those smooth, easy movements he contrived to cover ground more quickly than most men. Barnard stood, the receiver in his hand—"Mr. Silver, Miss Waldon."

He adored Louis Silver, who had taken him from the cash-desk in one of Fosdick's fruit stores, sent him to Severn and Berman's with the injunction that he was to learn shorthand and typing in his spare time. He discovered that the Barnards were wretchedly poor ; that young Ike Barnard was both quick and clever ; he always had a book under his arm—unusual books for a boy of nineteen, Louis felt. *The Life of Mozart*, *The Art of Leonardo da Vinci*, *The Five-Year Plan* and so on. Again and again he questioned the bespectacled Barnard, asking questions concerning those books, noting that the answers were not only ready, but intelligent. Silver was fully conscious of the gaps in his own knowledge. He had left school at an early age, and, when there, had studied only such subjects as interested him. It appeared that people—the kind of people he wished to meet—bandied about the names and histories of exactly the kind of people of whom young Barnard liked to read.

Louis engaged him as his private secretary. He remembered the morning he told Barnard, "I want you as my private secretary" ; he had smiled and added—"a very special kind of secretary."

It was then that he remembered how years ago he had said, "Wait until I want a very special kind of private

secretary;" and Marjorie had flung away, pouting and declaring that she wanted to go into one of Fosdick's shops! Why did things continually remind him of what hurt so badly—even now?

He installed Barnard at Carrick, consulting him about a thousand matters which he would never have mentioned to anyone else. Instead of growing impudent, instead of presuming, Ike Barnard treated his employer with something almost approaching reverence. He had a genius for detail, and would search all day in the reference department of the big public library for some fact which Louis needed.

Once, in a rare burst of self-revelation, Louis said, "Confound it, Barnard, how is it that you know these things and I don't?"—adding, "You must think that I'm utterly stupid."

Barnard's face expressed a kind of consternation, as if some god had confessed to feet of clay.

"Mr. Thilver, I should never think that. It's just that your tastes have been different from mine. I admire you tho much because you like to know, refuthe to remain in ignorance contherning what is of real interest to you."

His researches amused Louis, who frequently returned home to find neatly typed slips laid on his writing-table.

"Manet—not to be confused with Monet. French painter. Enclo. a p.c. of 'Le fifre' by Manet Ed.;" or, "Villon, Francois, French poet and loose liver. Probably thief. Date approx. 1456. Frequented drinking-house known as Pomme de Pin." And again: "Lola Montez, mistress of Ludwig First of Bavaria. Not to be confused with the modern 'Tart'. Very beautiful; probably dabblsd considerably in politics. Ballerina, and—though she did act—not a particularly good actress. Died in America. Interesting personality."

Barnard's devotion was absolute, his discretion complete; he spoke little, worked hard, and, Louis believed,

would have willingly died to have saved his employer the slightest worry. He felt a certain contempt for Barnard, but the fellow amused him, and—he was useful.

That night Louis, having put in a hard day at the warehouse and at Severn and Berman's; having had several long conversations with his manager on the telephone regarding Silver's Cleanser, and having rushed into his stockbroker's office to give him instructions regarding some shares which were up and—Louis knew—ready to go down, set out for Pettingly, with a slip of paper in his pocket which told him all the most important events in the life of Théodor Kopuloff.

Calm and undisturbed, he leaned back in his comfortable, unpretentious car, relaxing his muscles, for he had learnt to conserve his mental and physical energy to the greatest possible extent. "Money" Cohen said that by sticking his feet up on a chair, while he sat in another, by closing his eyes for less than five minutes, Louis Silver could renew himself.

"He's a wonder," Cohen said, "our Myst'ry Man!"

Tonight he was going to ask Alicia Waldon to marry him. He wanted someone to act as hostess. Carrick needed a mistress; he wanted to begin to found a family. Only a few days before, David, blushing and stammering, had said in answer to Louis' mechanical question, "How is your wife?" that Gracie wasn't terribly well.

"We hope—that is—we think that perhaps"—David stumbled over the words—"that—it may be a baby."

Louis said, "Really! Good for you," and felt, for the first time, that he wanted children—lovely children with fair shining hair, with blue eyes and soft skins, children who would race about the lawns of Carrick and grow up to expect, and get, only the best of everything. It was not that he had any particular love for children, but always at the back of his mind lay the vague belief that in making life easy, pleasant and safe for his own

children he might wipe out the sting of Marjorie's death. Once he had said to Barnard, "Look me out some reasonable book on reincarnation. If you think there is anything in it, let me have some of the salient points marked with pencil. I've not time to wade right through the whole book."

Then, by the time the book was delivered, with Barnard's *précis* and carefully marked passages, Louis had grown almost ashamed of his interest, had sneered at himself for being a sentimental fool, and the book had remained unopened.

He had watched Alicia Waldon closely; she had obviously been attracted, and his visits to Pettingly had been frequent. They used each other's Christian name, laughed over trifles, rode and played tennis together. He felt pretty certain what her answer would be. He was prepared to settle ten thousand pounds on her; he might even make it twelve.

Silver's Cleanser was becoming, and Johnnie Morley had succeeded in getting in touch with his "Chemist pal", who proved to be a young man of resource, with a retentive memory, and a genius for utilizing any waste products. Silver's Silver Polish followed the Cleanser, and already they were planning an advertising campaign for Silver's Shine-All, a new production which Morley said, "Does jest about everything, barring the cooking, for yer."

Yes, he might settle twelve thousand on Alicia, or stick to ten and give her a couple of thousand shares in Silver's.

II

Théodor Kopuloff took his hands from the keys and let them slip on to his knees, remaining seated at the piano in that attitude of complete dejection which had become part of his stock-in-trade. The public had come to look

for it, had come to regard his immobility as a fitting end to whatever he had played. The applause never burst out until Kopuloff raised his head and with great, melancholy eyes stared over the heads of his audience.

Alicia Waldon sat with her chin on her hand ; Maud Ganton's hands were clasped in slightly overdone ecstasy ; Harry Waldon slewed his eyes round, wondering if he dare make a move and get a whisky-and-soda. There was no doubt that the Russian seller was first rate, but he played too long, gave you too much ; twenty solid minutes and not a tune in the whole thing. He kept stopping too, so that you imagined that he'd finished, got ready to say, "Thank you so much", and then found the chap had started off again ! Geoffrey Ganton, tall, lean, with a long, sensitive face, and hair which was rapidly thinning from a high forehead, sighed, and, taking off his glasses, rubbed them on a very large white silk handkerchief. Music always affected him deeply ; he kept a piano in his library, and played for hours when he knew that Maud was out of the house.

"Thank you, Kopuloff ; I haven't heard music like that since we were in Russia. Only your music stoned for the damned discomfort."

Louis started ; the harsh, dogmatic voice of old Lady Howley jerking him back to reality. He felt angry ; the awakening had been too sudden. That raucous old voice, the expletive flung out like a challenge to Soviet Russia and all its works, seemed almost shocking after the music to which he had listened. For the first time in his life he had heard wonderful music played by a master. He had heard thunder die away to soft falling rain which fell in limpid drops, he had heard the trilling of birds, the sound of the wind in the trees ; he had even glimpsed in the far distance that strange thing which he imagined must be beauty. Now that old harridan, Lady Howley, with her wig, raddled cheeks and claw-like hands, had pushed beauty away and shattered his

dream. Not a dream—not anything so actual, so tangible—merely, perhaps, the promise of a vision.

Kopuloff, running his hands through his hair, rose and came back to the group which had assembled round the piano. He was a thick-set old man with a shock of untidy grey hair, and a skin from which all colour had gone, leaving it like badly tanned leather.

He took not the slightest notice of anyone except Lady Howley.

"Ah, Russia," he said. "That country . . ." Then, as if he must make some comment on his own playing, "You are right. When I play I atone for all sins. I am—in zee world today—zee only pianist who can play zees master's works. Many try; all fail—miserrably—except Kopuloff."

He sat down beside the old woman, his hands, with their tremendous stretch, their blunt yet aesthetic fingers, on his knees. He began to speak rapidly, in a sharp, high-pitched tone.

"Once, in the Ggreat War, all was lost. Kopuloff was wiz the arrmy. There was leetle food, leetle warmth—leetle hope. The Grand Duke—he was my dear god-father—he gave me as a present at my christening an ikon set with pearls. I have lost it long ago. He said, 'Kopuloff, dear godson, play and revive the hopes of the arrmy.' A piano was procured; there, in the midst of the cold, with the weend sweeping over us, round us, I played. I played—a silly thing—Staccato Caprice—Vogrich—I ended. No sound. I played again. All round me soldiers, beaten, hopeless men. Listening, listening, listening. I played again—Sonata in A flat—Beethoven. All of it. Each movement more beautiful than the last. I come to an end. The Grand Duke wrung my hand, kissed me, gave me his blessing. The men were on their feet, ready to go forward. They said, 'Kopuloff, play now a march—while we go forward. I played—which march I forgot. Still, I remember

the sound of the feet dying away in the distance, while Kopuloff played and played!"

Lady Howley said, "Is that true, Kopuloff?"

He pursed his lips. "No, it is not true, but it might have been had there been a piano."

Harry Waldon said, "Well, upon my soul! Let me give you a drink, Mr. Kopuloff!"

They were all talking, the tension was broken, the preposterous story had left them vaguely uncomfortable, anxious to drown the memory of it with their own voices. Louis whispered to Alicia, "Come out and let's get some air, shall we?"

The night was cool, and the soft wind, blowing from the south-west, very soothing.

Alicia said, "There will be rain before morning."

"Probably. That's a strange old man—"

"He's a great musician—and a tremendous liar. It takes Lady Howley to burst his bubbles. I believe that he's come to think that some of his stories are actually true."

Louis said, very softly, "I suppose most of them might have been, given one improbable actuality. But that might be said of most things."

She laughed. "You're serious tonight, . . ."

Her light, emotionless voice brought him out of his speculations; he was conscious that Kopuloff's ridiculous story had affected him. Given a grand piano in the midst of a battlefield, well—given this and that—given a different start, Louis Silver might have been a very different fellow. For once his complete satisfaction in his life and his attainments was shaken; he felt dissatisfied, ready to despise himself because tonight he was going to ask a woman, who loved him no better than he loved her, to marry him. The promise of beauty which Kopuloff's playing had given him remained, disquieting and disturbing. What was this beauty? What was it that made little Barnard grow bright-eyed and excited

over some picture? What was it made Geoffrey Ganton so obviously moved and emotional? Those painters whose pictures Louis Silver had never had time to see, those poets whose poetry he had never given himself enough leisure to read, those musicians whose music he had never heard—Barnard assured him that most of them died poor, ill and disappointed. What had driven them to devote their lives to—what Louis supposed must be the pursuit of this astounding thing—beauty?

He looked at Alicia, tall and slim in her pale satin dress, which fell in long soft folds until it touched the ground and billowed round her feet.

He said, "I feel that it's a serious moment. Don't you?"

Again that soft, impersonal laugh. "Why so serious?"

"You know what I've brought you out here to say—come, be honest!"

"My dear Louis——!"

"Will you marry me, Alicia? I'll do everything to make you happy."

She said quietly, "Louis—I want to marry you."

He took her hand, holding it for a moment in his, sensing its soft, smooth quality. Her hands had been kept soft since she was born. She had never dug her fingers into rotten fruit, never unpacked crates, tearing her skin on bent and hidden nails. Even now, despite all his care, his own hands showed traces of the days when he had done these things. He drew her to him, until her face was close to his. He could smell the scent which she used—stuff from Paris, in small black bottles which cost enough to keep a poor man's family for a week. The perfume filled his nostrils, made him wish, suddenly, that he was taking her home with him that very night, so that he might enjoy her beauty to the full, completely and without reservation.

"Seal our bargain," he said, and kissed her lips.

Later he talked to Harry Waldon, who, during the

course of the evening, had contrived to imbibe a considerable amount of whisky. Waldon listened, assumed an expression of slightly owl-like gravity, and said "Pre-cisely" at intervals.

Matters were discussed, the settlement was agreed upon, when Waldon said, "Oh, Silver—jus' one thing. Y'r religion. Can't let Alicia be married in a synagogue, y'know. Not that I'm narrow, but I could never stomach that."

"There is no need to." Louis smiled. "I am not a practising Jew."

"No? Get no religion? That's bad, isn't it?"

"I am free to marry Alicia in any church you wish, sir. I assure you I have never been in a synagogue in my life."

"Oh, I see! Then you're not a—whatcher call it—a full-blooded Jew?"

"My mother is a Christian, sir."

"Ah!" From the tone of relief, Louis reflected, Sir Harry Waldon's religion might have been the most important factor in his life. "Ah, then that's all right. Splendid! I'm sure that you'll make Alicia a first-rate husband. First rate. Wish you all the luck in the world, Silver."

As he drove home through the soft darkness, where rain had begun to fall, Louis remembered that neither he nor Alicia had mentioned the word "love". Well, and why should they? They would probably make as good a job of marriage as those sentimental fools who talked of nothing else.

III

Two months later he married Alicia Waldon at the old Parish Church of Pettingly. To Louis there was something incongruous in the crowd of smartly dressed people who filled the little Norman church. Clothes

which declared themselves to be products of Bond Street and Paris, men whose ties, coats and immaculate trousers proclaimed them moulds of Fashion as dictated by the exclusive shops and expensive tailors of the West End. It was all rather artificial and boring ; Alicia, followed by six young women and two tiny children, who behaved disgracefully during the service, and were finally carried off screaming by their relatives ; Harry Waldon emotional, ready to enlarge upon what the loss of Alicia meant to him, and growing more and more tearful as the afternoon wore on ; himself, wearing conventional wedding clothes, feeling overdressed, and looking, he felt, like a pouter pigeon with his elaborately tied grey tie.

It was a relief to change into cool and comfortable clothes, to know that the car was waiting to carry them away, out of this crowd of chattering people, to swift trains, steamers, and later the warmth of the South of France.

Little Barnard stood beside him in the big unfamiliar bedroom and handed him books, tickets and papers.

"Your cheque-book, the travellers' cheques, English money. Tickets, and—passport. That's an important document, Mr. Thilver. You ought always to keep it with you. Most important."

"Thanks, Barnard ; and you'll keep an eye on my mother while I'm away ? Don't let her get lonely ; take her out for a drive now and then."

"Indeed I will—and I do wish you every happiness. Mazal Tov."

Louis said, "Eh ? Oh yes—thanks."

Alicia, standing at the top of the wide stairs, her arm through his, very cool and serene, smiled faintly, assuring him that she was not in the least tired. Sir Harry, with champagne-glass raised—how much had he drunk that afternoon ?—stood in the hall shouting, "Here they are ! Jolly good luck !" Then his mother, with eyes which betrayed the fact that she had been crying, caught

him to her, whispering, "Oh, Loo, it's been a lovely wedding and she is a lovely young lady. I do 'ope you'll both be as 'appy as you deserve."

He said, "Happier, I hope, Jane, my dear."

David, looking stiff and unreal in his dark clothes, clasped his hand and whispered, "Gracie was so sorry she couldn't come, but—you understand, don't you? She'd have felt out of place with things—well, as they are at the moment. Good luck."

An impression of a crowd on the wide steps, with servants peering from the windows, then the car moved forward, and Alicia sighed, "Oh, thank Heaven that's over! What a complete fool my father made of himself!"

During the journey she talked lightly, neither of them making the slightest reference to their feeling for each other, their life together or the future. They discussed the excellence of the train, the poorness of the tea, the wisdom of their decision to stay the night in London, and their hope that the play to which they were going might prove interesting. Louis found some amusement in it all. Her attitude was so detached, her whole manner so controlled; there was no sign of shyness or confusion. Again and again he thought, 'And what a relief! How I should have loathed a blushing, stammering bride!'

Only once, when he suggested that they should sup and dance after the theatre, did her voice sound in the least personal. She smiled her assent, saying, "You really are a most thoughtful and efficient husband for any young woman as constitutionally lazy as I am. I should never have thought of these things for myself."

They danced, they continued their easy conversation; once or twice she made him smile by her comments on the other dancers, their clothes and the way they moved. He felt that he could so easily have driven her back, bent over her hand and said, "Thank you for a really charming evening," then driven off to another hotel.

Only when they danced, and he felt her body soft against his, realized how smooth was her skin, and how provocative her mouth, with its firm, full lines, was he conscious of her physical attraction.

He glanced at his watch. "Half past twelve. We have to catch the ten-thirty. I think it's time we were off. You've had a long day."

"Very well. It's been delightful. I am a little tired, perhaps."

In the hotel he went to his dressing-room. The dividing door was closed, and beyond it he could hear Alicia moving about, unhurried and undisturbed. He was surprised to find that his own fingers were unsteady as he untied his tie. His thoughts rushed forward. He was going into Alicia's room ; he was going to enjoy the full realization of her beauty ; she would lie in his arms, give herself to him completely. His experience of women had been small. He did not look back on any of the incidents of his sexual life with the least shame or regret. They had been merely experiences, the majority of them disappointing and disillusioning. He had never allowed himself to spend money wildly on women ; he had never attempted to become in the least affectionate or romantic —the majority of women he had known would not have appreciated either quality.

This was different. Alicia was his wife ; she was lovely, well bred, socially his superior. Here the stage was set, as he had always felt that it ought to be : beautiful rooms, fine linen, fine furniture—not some drab, stuffy room, where the sheets were dingy and would not bear too close an inspection.

He stood for a moment under the cold shower, felt his skin react to the slight chill of the water, and the smart rubbing of the big bath-towel in which he wrapped himself.

Pyjamas which were of heavy silk, slippers of fine brightly coloured leather, a dressing-gown which might

be highly coloured, but which looked what it was—expensive. He stood before the glass, brushing his dark hair with the ivory brushes which had been Alicia's present to him, scrutinizing his face in the mirror.

He was pale, but healthily so, with even teeth, bright, intelligent eyes—at the moment shining more brightly than usual—a firm chin, a head which was set well on his shoulders. He sighed with satisfaction.

"Louis Silver," he said softly, "you've not done too badly."¹²

Then, switching off the light, he walked to the door of Alicia's room and knocked. Her voice, still unmoved and calm, answered, "Come in."

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER ONE

I

Louis, his chin propped on his hands, sat in his study, at the big desk which was kept meticulously neat by Barnard. He looked older than his twenty-four years warranted. The dark hair was retreating a little from his temples ; it had become slightly streaked with grey ; his face had grown thinner, the bony structure showing plainly through the skin. His mouth drooped at the corners. He looked—what indeed he was—a man who is tired to the point of exhaustion.

Barnard entered, carrying in a correspondence-tray letters ready for signature. Louis looked up, nodded, and the letters were placed before him. He began to read them through, scrawling his signature at the foot of each. Though he read with care, though the full sense communicated itself to his brain, he was conscious of a queer running undercurrent, a kind of commentary which went on in his mind.

'How many letters do I sign a day ? How many irons have I in the fire ? Is this depression really going to knock the bottom out of everything ? What are the bills for Carrick going to be at the end of this month ? How is it that Alicia is never satisfied unless she is embarking on some new scheme, and all her schemes mean money ?' On and on, thoughts and questions to which he never found answers.

Barnard said softly, "I have here the estimate for the large drawing-room. Have you time to look through it before you go to dress ?"

"Give it to me—yes. There's a dinner-party tonight, isn't there? God, do we entertain every damned night? It seems like it to me—"

"Or else you are entertained," Barnard amended.

Louis' lips twisted into a smile. "I'm rarely entertained," he said. "I'm usually bored to extinction. I say, Barnard, this estimate's steep, isn't it? Where did it come from? Grimes and Crawshaw—Knightsbridge, London. No, I'm damned if I give an order to people in London. Let a local firm do it. Wilkins are good enough for anyone."

Barnard said, "They submitted an estimate. Mrs. Thilver didn't like their designs."

"Designs! I suppose we can tell them what we want, and they can carry it out. What was the price—compared with this rigmarole?"

"About . . ." Barnard considered, worked a problem in mental arithmetic, his fingers moving as if he held a pencil and was jotting down figures. "About thirty-two per cent less."

"I thought so. I'll speak to Mrs. Silver. Leave the estimate."

He picked up the letters and went softly out of the room. Louis locked his desk, rose and made his way upstairs. What a bore it was, this dinner-party! He didn't even know who was coming. A dinner-party had been the cause of his first quarrel with Alicia, when he had asked where his mother would sit, and Alicia had raised her eyebrows. Jane had caught sight of her doing it too. That was what had infuriated him. Jane hadn't come to the dinner, and, two days later, had asked him if she could have her own rooms, and "live separate".

He remembered the conversation so well. Jane with very bright eyes, and lips which were pressed firmly together to prevent them trembling.

"You don't like Alicia, eh?" he had asked.

"Well, Loo—it's not just a question of liking ; I don't understand 'er."

"What is there to understand ?"

"Oh—to understand." She made a vague movement with her hands. "You see, Loo, she's a lady, and she likes 'er own way, and 'er ways aren't mine. No, it would be better if I could 'ave a couple of rooms of my own, an' maybe my meals could be brought up to me. You might come an' 'ave a bite with me sometimes when she's out or away. That 'ud be nice, Loo."

"Very nice," he returned savagely, thinking how nice it was when Alicia was out or away, and not filling Carrick with her friends, all noisy, all impecunious, all accustomed to sit up until all hours of the morning. He added, "Go down to Wilkins' and order everything you like for a couple of rooms. Get good stuff; make them really comfortable. I'll arrange which rooms—"

Now, as he undressed, he remembered how he had gone to Alicia, told her that he resented her rudeness to his mother, that Jane would in future have her own rooms—the two in the small west wing, overlooking the gardens.

Alicia, at her dressing-table, turned and look at him coldly.

"I suppose that you realize those are two of my best guest-rooms ?"

"I do," he said crisply ; "that's why my mother is having them."

"It would be far more satisfactory if your mother had a place of her own."

"For you, possibly—not for my mother or for me."

"Very well—I have nothing more to say."

She never argued. He wondered if it might not have been easier had she done so ; at least they might then have come to some understanding. It was ridiculous to say that "things had gone wrong" between them, for there had not been anything to go wrong ; they had never had the slightest real understanding or intimacy since

they married. Their honeymoon had been bearable because they were both on their best behaviour, both interested in the things and places they saw. He had spent money like water ; that was—he discovered—something which always amused and pleased Alicia. Spending money, receiving adulation and admiration.

Their physical relationship had bored her ; his hints that he wanted children had been received coldly. When he had met her eyes, unmoved, except for a faint expression of contempt and disgust, she had made him feel that he had overstepped the borders of good taste and decency. She never denied herself to him, but the whole thing had ceased to have any meaning. To Louis, at least, it had become bestial and degrading. Not that he deluded himself into believing that he had ever loved his wife, but her physical beauty had stirred him ; he had been attracted, had found that to hold her in his arms gave his over-taut nerves relief, left him relaxed and soothed. Now he found it an effort to enter her room, despised himself because the dictates of his own body drove him there from time to time.

Once there had been some beauty in that proximity to her body, but she had killed even that. Louis, remembering everything, set his teeth, hating Alicia, loathing himself.

"It's become a sort of formal visit," he said softly, "like going to the dentist—boring, unpleasant and necessary."

They had returned to Carrick, and Alicia had begun her demands for alterations. She had friends, it seemed, in every kind of business. One man was an interior decorator—Grimes and Crawshaw's chief designer ; another specialized in materials, imported brocades from Italy, and dealt in furniture. A third knew all that there was to be known about gardens, a fourth had invented some patent glass which—produced in any colour—might be used for the walls of bathrooms.

'Damn them!' Louis thought. 'They've all come round to see what they could get out of Carrick—and me.'

Then there had been her obvious dislike for Jane; lifted eyebrows when Jane's aspirates were flung to the wind, as they always were when she became nervous. That had culminated in his mother living in her two rooms and not meeting Alicia from one week's end to another. Oh, Jane was comfortable enough, content enough. That wasn't the point.

He finished his bath, towelled his slim body vigorously, and began to dress. The silk underclothes, fine linen, smooth cloth, still had power to soothe him. He stood before the long mirror intent upon tying his tie, reflecting that whatever annoyances life might hold, he was still Louis Silver, still 'the Mystery Man', still worth thousands, and able to make more. Depressions only hit men who couldn't look after their business, men who lost their heads and plunged wildly.

He picked up the estimates and knocked on Alicia's door.

Her voice bade him enter. She sat before her glass putting the last touches to her make-up. She made up beautifully, Louis admitted. Nothing was ever overdone, except those scarlet nails. How he hated those nails—too long, too pointed, too red!

She looked up, smiled and said, "Hello—I haven't seen you all day."

"I've been out of town; only got back after tea. I wanted to talk to you about this estimate. This from Grimes and Crawshaw. It's impossible!"

"Why?" Her voice was expressionless.

"Why? Look at it. Two hundred and twenty for decorating a drawing-room!"

"Maud Ganton paid more than that."

"Or her fool husband did, which? I don't happen to be Geoffrey Ganton, and I don't pay it. Wilkins can do it!"

"Very well, only if they do I shall never use the room. I'll keep it as a museum piece to show my friends. 'My husband prefers Wilkins of Melbrough to Grimes and Crawshaw.' How amusing!"

"Look here, Alicia." He sat down, trying to keep his temper, to be reasonable. "It's only a craze—this firm. Half the people only employ them because that designer of theirs has a handle to his name, Lord What-ever-he-is. Why fling away money like this?" He tapped the estimate. "It's so foolish. You know what you want; then make Wilkins—or some other firm here in the north—carry out your wishes. It's simple enough."

Alicia Silver laid down the big buster with which she was giving a final polish to her nails; she sighed, then yawned. "Oh, very well—only I don't care whether the room's done or not. Either it's got to be done well, or it can remain as it is—disgracefully shabby and entirely out of date."

Louis rose, folded the estimates and put them in his pocket.

"Very well," he said, "I'll see about it."

"What"—there was a faint tone of interest in her voice—"Grimes and Crawshaw?"

"No, Wilkins or Plummers of York."

II

The dinner not only bored but tired him. He had never cared for elaborate food, and the chef at Carrick seemed unable to prepare anything without a perfect army of additional sauces, pastes and diminutive salads comprised of extraordinary ingredients. Women gushed at Alicia and said, "Darling, your chef is divine; I wish that I could entice him away from Carrick," but there were times when Louis longed for a plain dinner, innocent of "trimmings" and strange flavours.

The one thing which commended Alicia's friends to him was their passion for gambling. To Louis the very sight of a deck of cards was a stimulant ; his eyes brightened, he forgot his tiredness, became animated and interested. To play high, to pit his wits against those of other people, was a tonic. He hated bridge ; the game was too long, too drawn-out, for his taste. His game was poker, and he was content to play until the light came filtering in through the long windows.

Among his wife's friends there might be people who disliked him, who would have liked to patronize him because he was self-made and never attempted to conceal the fact, but—they were forced to admit that Louis Silver played cards well ; more, that he played like a gentleman.

"Only fault with the beggar," said Grahame Hawkes, "is that he plays so damned high. Once he gets started nothing stops him. He freezes you out."

Roger Bendish, his eyes on Alicia, muttered, "Only fault ! I could think of fifty."

"The first and greatest"—Hawkes laughed softly and maliciously—"being that he married Alicia Waldon, eh ?"

Bendish coloured to the roots of his bright hair. His face always looked sulky ; he invariably had a frown between his well-marked eyebrows, and his jaw looked too heavy for a young man of thirty.

"Damn you, Hawkes !" he said. "Mind your own business."

"You'll make it everyone's business if you stare at her perpetually. Good God, man, do you want the whole county to know you're in love with her ?"

"I haven't admitted that I am."

Roger Bendish was the son of a neighbouring land-owner, a man who had begun life with considerable wealth, most of which had found its way into the pockets of the bookmakers. Mark Bendish had sold every acre of

land which was salable, had mortgaged everything on which mortgage might be raised, sold as many of the pictures and as much of the antique silver as could be dispensed with at Bendish Place. Roger had been brought up in an atmosphere where the "certainties" of today's "three o'clock" always became the disappointments of the "Late Editions". He had begun to get into debt while he was still at school, and when he returned from Rigley, his father, astonished and dismayed at the size and number of his debts, had flogged him unmercifully. Since then Roger had lived at home, ostensibly managing the estate, but in reality attending every possible race meeting, making love to any pretty woman who took his fancy, and piling up debts which both he and his father knew would never be paid.

The atmosphere at Bendish was but rarely "set fair"; Roger and his father quarrelled and disagreed continually. They both drank more than was good for them, both had tempers which were naturally hasty and undisciplined, and, though, fundamentally, a certain affection existed between them, their lives consisted in plunging from one violent argument into another.

Roger, handsome, reckless and impetuous, had drifted from one love affair to another, until, immediately after her return from her honeymoon, he had conceived a passion for Alicia Silver. Her serenity, her complete self-control and her physical beauty made a tremendous appeal to Roger. He angled for invitations to Carrick whenever possible, and even played with the idea of asking Louis Silver to find him some position in one of his concerns. This evening, watching her as she moved among her guests in her long, shimmering dress, with the pearls Louis had given her gleaming softly against her pale skin, Roger Bendish felt a desire for her which amounted almost to physical pain.

He thought, 'She is mine; she was made for me. There has never been any woman who meant so much.'

Compared with what I feel for her, the others—have been less than nothing. She's got to know, got to understand, got to give herself to me. I can't bear to live without her. . . .'

Alicia watched him, her cool grey eyes missing nothing. She liked his tall figure with its broad shoulders ; his hair, bright with lights which gleamed red and gold ; she liked his half-sulky expression, and his hard, bright blue eyes. She looked at his hands, big, well-kept hands, the backs powdered with freckles ; she caught the gleam of the fine golden hairs at his wrists. When he spoke to her his eyes devoured her ; they were hungry, and, she felt, cruel. The thought of him made her heart beat a little faster. Here was the type of man she understood. Not smooth and slim and successful ; not a man with half his mind steeped in stocks and shares, business and commerce. She felt that Roger Bendish treated women as men treated their favourite horses—petting them, taking immense pride in them, but making demands of them, and never allowing them to deny or question those demands. What had she heard her father say a hundred times ?—“Treat women like horses ; hit ‘em and hold ‘em !”

Louis was busy dealing out chips. How he “came alive” at the prospect of card-playing ! How his eyes brightened, and his whole figure seemed to become revitalized ! Good-looking in his own way, Alicia mused ; straight and well made, even handsome. Was he really a Jew ? she wondered. If so—instinctively her eyes went back to Bendish—she had heard that Jews were revengeful, that they nursed their grievances, paid debts without money, were willing to wait and watch and—destroy. Louis never spoke of his own affairs. His mother obviously was a common little woman, not so well educated as Alicia’s own maid ; his brother David, solid and honest, she didn’t doubt, but content to live in a small stuffy house with his small rather stuffy wife—ordinary people.

"Gracie"—what a name! She'd just had a baby boy, and Louis on hearing the news had frowned, and been irritable, and later—a little tiresome. She supposed that one day she would have to give him children; it might be pleasant to have two nice children, beautiful and clever. Besides, if a man wanted them and his wife denied him the family for which he craved, what was the result?

Again her eyes followed Bendish, and the expression in them changed, grew softer and more thoughtful.

The play continued. Grahame Hawkes, young Tom Tilney and Bendish all lost heavily. Bendish plunged, over-called, bet too heavily and generally lost his head. Sir Harry Waldon played carefully, and swore that he lost more by doing so. Alicia smiled; she knew her father. For years he had declared that he never won at cards, and for years his daughter had realized that in point of fact he rarely ever lost. All the women, except Maud Ganton, who played cards like a harridan, screaming and shrieking at intervals, had fallen out and stood watching.

Ganton, glancing at his watch, said, "I say—one more round and we ought to be off."

Roger Bendish whispered to Alicia, "Stand by me; bring me luck."

She moved nearer to him, so that her bare arm brushed against his coat-sleeve. Louis Silver smiled as he dealt.

"Cards."

Bendish glanced at his hand, hesitated, then shook his head.

Waldon ejaculated, "Sitting pretty, eh?"

Louis said, "And the dealer takes—two."

Maud Ganton, Waldon, Tilney and Hawkes went out early; Ganton hung on, then threw in his hand with an exclamation of annoyance at his own weakness. Louis and Bendish were left. Alicia watched their faces intently. Her husband's pale and inscrutable, his hands

firm, his voice low and even ; Bendish had flushed a little, his fingers were not quite steady, his voice sounded husky. He touched his chips—

"I'll see you."

Louis said, "A full house."

"So've I." Bendish drew a deep breath. "Knaves high."

"Kings—and tens."

Ganton said, "And a nice little haul for you, Silver."

Louis swept his winnings together. "Bad luck, Bendish."

As he undressed that night Louis smiled at his reflection in the mirror. How very evident Roger Bendish had made it that he was attracted by Alicia, and how very stupid Alicia had been to watch him with such attention ! Why, Louis could almost read her thoughts as he saw her eyes turn from Bendish to himself. He had caught that whisper, "Stand by me ; bring me luck."

What fools people were ! Well, they could have a run for their money, so long as Alicia didn't make herself conspicuous ; so long as she didn't develop some stupid romantic tendency or other, and begin locking her door and making scenes. He didn't care. Things had gone wrong ; as an investment Alicia had not turned out as he had hoped. He had never loved her, never imagined that she loved him, but he had believed that she would be a mistress for his home, and—give him children.

Now David's wife, his fluffy-haired Gracie, had produced a son. David, bursting with pride, talked of its weight and strength. At those moments Louis almost hated his brother. Then his anger swerved, and he felt that he hated Alicia because she was cheating him out of something he wanted—something on which he had counted—the one thing his money could not buy—children ; at least a son, as David had.

Instead she allowed her eyes to follow Bendish ; indulged in speculations concerning him, grew tender,

he didn't doubt, when she thought of his beef and brawn, his stupidity and his debts. Well, let him discover that she and Bendish went beyond the bounds of conventional behaviour and he'd break the pair of them, and let the whole county watch him do it.

Carefully he counted from his winnings two hundred and fifty pounds, his lips curving into a smile. Alicia humiliated him, did she—let that fool Hawkes and that cackling idiot Maud Ganton see that Bendish had fallen for her ! Then, if there were humiliating to be done, Louis Silver might take a hand in the game.

He thrust the notes into the pocket of his dressing-gown. His smile deepened when he remembered how much of it had come from Roger Bendish, and how ill—if rumour spoke correctly—Bendish could spare it. More fool he to play at all !

Louis knocked on Alicia's door ; there was a slight pause, then she said, "Come in."

As he entered she switched on the light, saying, "It's very late, isn't it ?"

"Half past two."

Later he stood by the side of her bed, and, smiling, looked down at her. She was lovely, he admitted—lovely, cold and selfish.

She said, "Yes, what is it ?"

"Only I've something here for you. You can have your drawing-room done by Grimes if you wish." He held out the roll of notes. "There you are, two hundred and fifty."

Her saw her face flush, knew that she realized the insult, that she resented it, felt that she was—being paid. Queer ; women would run into debt, commit the wildest extravagances, spend your money like water, and never connect that with—wages. Offer them money, as he now offered it to Alicia, and she felt like a prostitute.

"Take it," he said. "It's not generosity—I won it. Thank Bendish and Hawkes and Tom Tilney."

She shrugged her shoulders, lying there among her pillows, cool and apparently undisturbed, except for that faint flush which betrayed her.

"Put it on the dressing-table," she said. "Isn't that the proper procedure? Good night."

Louis turned away, laid the notes on the dressing-table, placed a gold cigarette-case on the top to prevent them fluttering away when the maid flung the windows wide in the morning, then, still smiling, he said, "Good night," and returned to his own room.

III

Roger Bendish and his father sat facing each other at breakfast. They were both big men; old Mark florid and heavy, bearing on his face the marks of a life which had been lived to the full. He scowled at his son, and Roger returned the scowl with interest.

"I tell you I've none to give you! Damn it, can't you take 'no' for an answer?"

The younger man retorted, "I tell you that I've got to have something. I don't care how little. I'm cleaned out. Silver scooped the lot from me last night."

"Then you shouldn't play with the little tick! Leave cards alone."

"Do you leave them alone?" Roger shouted. "Don't you gamble all day and every day?"

"I've a right to do what I like with my own money!" They were both shouting now, scarcely listening to what the other said.

"Haven't I any rights?" Roger demanded. "Am I to live like a blasted pauper?"

His father, pounding the table with a clenched fist, bawled, "Rights—no! Privileges—and I give 'em to you!"

He got up, gathered *The Times* into an untidy

handful and stamped out of the room. Roger sat still, his hands deep in his pockets, his legs outstretched. What a damnable business life was ! No money—what he'd won at Doncaster he'd lost to Louis Silver. Where was any more to come from ? It was certain that he couldn't get along with nothing in his pockets. Bills everywhere, credit difficult to get, tradesmen—damn them—making excuses about the depression, and having to meet "calls".

He rose, went out into the stable-yard, where, in spite of bad times, there were still horses, and good 'uns' at that. Roger shouted to the groom. Both he and his father always shouted in preference to speaking in ordinary tones ; it had become a habit with them.

"Put a saddle on 'Charlie Mac' !"

A big raking hunter, that could do anything except win the National. Not quite good enough for that, but able to win all the local point-to-points. Roger reflected that it took something to stand up to his weight—after all, bone weighed heavy. He knew that in a few years the bone would be well covered with flesh, and even now he had begun to restrict his diet, to cut out bread and sweets, to stick to toast and "Ryvita". He loathed the idea of growing stout.

He rode out of the stable-yard, along the road, and then down a narrow lane which led to the Bendish woods, and through them to the land round Carrick, growing more tranquil, his mind turning back to Alicia Silver ; lovely Alicia Silver, in her shimmering dress, with her low voice, her poise and certainty. Married to that narrow-hipped little Jew. Not that he was so little either ; well enough made, but automatically detestable because he was Alicia's husband.

His thoughts raced along, until he felt his heart pounding, and knew that his head felt overloaded. He checked "Charlie Mac" and sat in the pale sunshine, his hat in his hand, the light shining on his bright hair,

making him look like some gilded statue. Both horse and man were motionless, outlined against the sky.

Alicia caught sight of them as she rode out of the Carrick woods towards the more open land, with the little hill looking as if it had been placed there so that Roger might be silhouetted for her to see. She was a good horsewoman, and knew it; it seemed fitting to her that they should meet at that moment, when she was still smarting from Louis' brutality, and that she should turn to Roger Bendish for comfort and a mental affinity which should soothe her wounded pride.

Roger did not turn; the hooves of Alicia's horse made no sound on the thick turf. She rode towards him, her eyes fixed on his magnificent figure, a sense of content filling her at the sight of the straight back, and the glinting hair. For the first time in her life she knew that she had found a man who made a real and insistent appeal to her. She had been coldly conscious that she must marry for money, make a match which would be to her advantage. Now Roger Bendish, with his strength, his simplicity, with that indefinable something which made her feel that he was a creature of primitive impulses, stirred her profoundly. Louis never gave way to impulse; Louis thought out everything, weighed everything carefully, made assessments and arrived at decisions. She was tired of his smoothness and success, tired of his certainty and restraint; she longed for violence, for demands, and for love which acknowledged no limits and respected no boundaries.

Her horse mounted the little hill. She hoped that they might reach the summit before Roger was conscious of her presence, but he—with quick hearing developed through years of rough shooting, tracking down game, and spending long hours in the woods—swung round suddenly in his saddle.

She never forgot the expression on his face.

She thought, 'He's glad to see me. He really cares!'

Roger, taken by surprise, called, "Alicia—how wonderful!"

He flung himself out of the saddle and came towards her, while "Charlie Mac" began to crop the sweet herb-sprinkled grass. Standing beside her, his face uplifted, he took her hand in his. He was inarticulate; words had never come easily to him; he was both shy and self-conscious. He wanted to tell her that he loved her, that he had dreamt of her, that she was the embodiment of all he imagined most beautiful in the world. Instead, he took her hand, rubbed it gently against his cheek and said, "I say—this is marvellous luck, isn't it?"

CHAPTER TWO

I

ALICIA RODE HOME CONSCIOUS THAT SHE WAS experiencing a new sensation. She was disturbed, surprised, but there was no uncertainty in her mind. She felt something for Roger Bendish which she had never known before, a queer composite emotion which refused to be reduced to one least common denominator. It had been sufficiently simple to analyse her feelings towards Louis Silver. From the first his smooth self-sufficiency had interested her. She had liked his easy movements, his assumption that his ideas, his plans, and his paths were all to lead to success—for himself. Without sentiment or emotion he had asked her to marry him; he had loaded her with gifts, but the giving of them had carried not the slightest affection. She had felt that he gave her pearls because he wished his wife to wear better jewellery than Maud Ganton and the rest of the women he knew, not because he wished to please her. She was part of his success, a mistress for Carrick, a wife for Louis Silver, and, as such, she must outshine in clothes, pearls and general elegance the wives of other men and the mistresses of other houses.

Their honeymoon had been sufficiently pleasant. Louis had been attentive and kind enough. True, he had never bothered to make pretty speeches; never, even after their most intimate moments, voiced expressions of tenderness, but she had neither wished for nor expected them. Only after their return to Carrick had she begun definitely to dislike him. First there was the stupidity about his mother, then his statement that he wanted

children. He had not troubled to mask his desires with hints ; he had stated his wishes quite openly, and, she felt, coarsely. She remembered how he had stood in her bedroom, watching her while she dressed for dinner. He had swung on his toes a little, intent, watching and cold. Then quite suddenly—she remembered that her maid had just left the room, and that she had turned to her dressing-table and picked up a ring—he had spoken.

"My brother's wife had a son this morning."

"Really?" David Silver did not interest her, neither did his fluffy-haired, common little wife. She could not display any interest in their brat.

"I'm envious," Louis said. "You must give me a son, Alicia!"

She had stared at him. "My dear Louis, need we be quite so—outspoken?"

He had not replied, only answered her with another question.

"You don't want children, eh?"

"Oh . . ." she shrugged her shoulders. "One day—I suppose. Certainly not yet. We're only just back from our honeymoon."

"I see."

He had walked out into his dressing-room, and had not mentioned the subject again. But, Alicia reflected, Louis' silence never meant that he had dismissed a subject from his mind, only that he was waiting to press his claims when the moment presented itself. That was one of the traits which she hated—his ability to wait in silence, his inability to forget anything on which he had set his heart.

Now things had happened. For days she had known that, whenever they met, Roger Bendish watched her, embraced every possible opportunity to talk to her, pay her rather halting compliments, and follow her about in a way which, Alicia felt certain, he believed to be unobtrusive.

Last night his whispered "Stand by me; bring me luck" had filled her with excitement. She admitted the utter stupidity of such a sensation. She was married, Louis was rich, young Bendish had scarcely a penny with which to bless himself. His reputation had been common gossip for several years, and he was recognized as a general lover. The sight of him playing cards with Louis had held her spellbound. Louis, so unmoved, his eyes quiet, his hands steady, had presented such a contrast to young Bendish, with his flushed face, his anxious eyes and his general air of trying to face his possible loss with equanimity. She had seen his expression during the second when Louis gathered up his winnings; the flush had died, there were white patches round his nostrils, he looked suddenly sick and a little frightened. He had recovered himself quickly, and contrived to make a joke of it all, but, in her ears at least, the words had sounded not amusing but pathetic.

Then—and at the remembrance she jerked the reins suddenly, so that the mare flung up her head in protest—there was that scene in her bedroom. Louis calm, dispassionate and demanding. For weeks he had been distasteful to her; last night she had hated him. He had stood, his hands in the pockets of his silk dressing-gown, a smile flickering on his lips.

"... I've something here for you. . . . There you are, two hundred and fifty."

Now she recalled with a certain satisfaction that she had replied he could put it on the dressing-table, adding, "That's the proper procedure, isn't it?"

Later, when she lay with her flushed face against the cool linen of her pillows, she had tried to imagine what had prompted him to make the—gift. "'Gift'!" Alicia thought. "'Payment' is a better word. Louis never makes gifts."

He had seen Roger moving his arm so that it might touch hers, had perhaps heard Roger's whisper, seen his

eyes following her, noticed his obvious admiration. Well—and what of it?

She had wakened that morning filled with two emotions—anger against her husband and a desire to see and talk with Roger Bendish. Louis had left for his office without seeing her. She had risen, bathed and ordered her mare. She had ridden through the park, over towards Bendish Place, hoping against hope that Roger might be riding that morning. Then, outlined against the blue sky, she had seen him on Caverly Beacon. He had taken her hand, said, "I say—this is marvellous luck, isn't it?" and rubbed her hand gently against his cheek, so that she could feel the faint stubble of beard rough against her skin. For the first time in her life she had longed to be generous, to give and take love. His strength, his splendid figure, his youth made an appeal to her; his lack of words and phrases seemed to her pathetic and essentially lovable.

She said, "It is luck—isn't it?" then wondered why she had given herself away so readily, and on the heels of that thought had come another, 'If I have—I don't care—I love him.'

They stood there talking, not saying much of importance, indulging in no great flights of sentiment. Roger rarely spoke in anything except the most brief sentences; he was inarticulate, using odd school-boy expressions, frowning and looking suddenly sullen when any remark of hers annoyed him or reminded him that she was Louis Silver's wife.

He said, "I wanted to see you—damnably, darling."

"Did you? I wonder why?"

That was when she noticed the upright line between his eyebrows.

"That's a damned lie. You don't wonder, you know. I say, Alicia, don't be difficult. You know—I know—it's a case. We've fallen for each other; what are we going to do about it?"

She tried to regain her poise, laughed softly and said, "If rumour speaks truly, there have been other cases—quite a number of them."

"Well"—his tone was defiant—"what of it? I'd not met you then. This is different. We both know that. There won't be anyone else now, I swear that, if you'll be decent to me."

"Decent?" she queried. "You're sure that's the right word?"

Again that quick scowl. "Oh, blast words! I'm not good at phrase-making. You've got to take me as I am. As good as some of the little pimps who string words together easily, anyway." Then abruptly, "Let's sit down. I can't talk to you when you're perched on that mare." He helped her down, swinging her to the ground, allowing her to feel his strength. She was a tall woman, but it was apparently no effort for him to lift her down. As her feet touched the ground he put his arms round her, pulled her to him and kissed her on the mouth; kissed her roughly, almost brutally.

"God!"—he held her at arm's length—"I wanted that badly."

Seated side by side on the short turf, he laid his hand on hers, then let his eyes wander to where her mare stood cropping the herbage.

"Nice mare," he said. "Had her long?"

"My husband gave her to me when we came back from our honeymoon."

His fingers tightened on hers. "To hell with that! You've never had a honeymoon—yet. You shall—one day." Then, speaking in the tones of a sulky school-boy, he added, "I lost a packet to him last night."

"I know—he told me; you and Tom Tilney and Hawkes." She had a wild desire to hurt him, to shake him out of his cool assumption that, because he loved her, she automatically loved him. "Louis gave me two hundred and fifty pounds—his winnings, I imagine."

Bendish said, "What on earth for?"

"It might have been a proof of affection. Men don't always give presents in payment, do they?"

"I fancy Silver doesn't give much away for nothing."

"No? Possibly you're right."

She spoke lightly, meeting his hard blue eyes squarely. For a moment she thought he was going to strike her; his eyes blazed, his mouth closed like a trap, then, to her intense surprise, he flung back his head and gave a great bark of laughter.

"That's funny! That's damnable funny! He gave you—the money he'd won from me! 'Pon my word, it would take a Jew to think out a scheme like that. It's interesting. He is a Jew, everyone says so—but I say—he's noticed something. That's why he gave you that money. It's obvious!"

"He sees most things—!"

"Well, what of it?" He twisted round and lay on his side, watching her face. "I say—what of it? You're not going to chuck me, Alicia? We'll manage somehow. God!—I'm crazy about you! You're lovely! The loveliest thing in the world. You love me, don't you?"

"If I do—it's against my better judgment."

He laughed. "Better judgment! Nothing! You were made for me, and I was made for you. We're both of us flesh and blood, not calculating machines. You want life and love—lots of it—and so do I! You'd rather be at Bendish Place, with its threadbare carpets and inefficient servants, than at Carrick, with—with that fish you call your husband. And—you know it."

She bent forward, and with the tip of her finger traced his features—the strong, heavy chin; the full, soft lips; the blunt, short nose, and the slightly protruding eyelids under their overhanging brows. As she felt the hard, firm flesh, the well-formed bones, a sudden rush of tenderness swept over her. He might be coarse, a loose-liver, in debt to his eyes, incapable of managing even his father's diminished

estate—a muddler—but she loved him. She was tired of cold sophistication, of material success, of low-voiced servants and a perfectly appointed house. She wanted a lover, wanted a man who would lash himself into a fury of passion over her, one who would be absorbed by her.

"I love you," she said softly.

"I know you do." He opened his eyes and stared up at her. "Come and kiss me."

"What?"—she glanced round—"here?"

"Why not? We're over the brow of the Beacon." He sat up, and pointed to the wide expanse of country, rolling away for miles. "Who's going to see us here?"

He caught her in his arms, pressed her head back so that it lay against his shoulder; she felt the rough tweed of his coat against her cheek, smelt the faint scent of peat smoke which it held. His lips were against hers, softer than she had imagined; he was whispering words to her, foolish, intimate things, sometimes spoken with a laugh behind them.

"When can I see you again?" he asked when he let her go. "Soon—it must be soon. Tomorrow? Yes, tomorrow."

"I'll ride this way——"

"No—not this way——" He was pinching his lip between finger and thumb, thinking, planning. "Look here—ride through to Bendish, take the turn through the low woods to the little lodge where we lunch when we're shooting. I'll be there first with the key. What time? Half past ten—yes, half past ten."

"Eleven—I think."

Again that quick scowl. She thought, 'How he hates to have even his smallest plans upset!'

"No, make it half past ten. Damn it, don't you want to see me again?"

"Of course—very well."

They walked their horses back to the road; he helped her to mount, ran his hand down the mare's shining neck,

and then rubbed her soft nose. "You're a beauty, my lovely," he said, "and you know it. Take care of her, Alicia, she's a peach." Then, swinging himself on to "Charlie Mac", he added, "Tomorrow at half past ten—you know the way. Good-bye."

He cantered off; Alicia Silver turned and stared after him. Surely he would look back! He did not throw a glance over his shoulder, and presently a turn in the rough road hid him from her.

II

Life had changed for Alicia. Whereas before it had been a series of small annoyances, it had now become a glorious affair charged with emotion and blazing with colour. Roger Bendish might be all that Louis and other men called him—stupid, unintelligent, a waster—but he possessed all those attributes which appealed to her. He was passionate, demanding, unreasonable, liable to fly into sudden tempers if she did not immediately comply with his wishes; but he had broken down her reserve, had given her the kind of love which she understood. Again and again she told herself that Louis alone was to blame for her infidelity; assured herself that his cool indifference had killed whatever affection she might have felt for him. He had shown too plainly that he had no real love, that he merely expected certain things from her—and for those things he was prepared to pay in money, jewels, or other material things.

She was careful, and tried to make Roger equally circumspect. Again and again she begged him to change their meeting-place; again and again he reassured her, saying, "It's all right. Don't panic, Alicia. Surely you know I've enough sense to keep things quiet."

"But do you?" she persisted. "Not only about the lodge, but—do you keep quiet yourself? I sometimes

get terrified when I see you drinking hard, loosening that tongue of yours, allowing your eyes to get out of control."

"Trust me ! My head's stronger than you realize. As for my eyes ! Half the men in the county undress you with theirs whenever they meet you !"

"And you don't resent it ?"

"Why should I ? It's the only tribute the poor blighters can pay you."

"If Louis found out ?"

"I sometimes wish that he would. He'd divorce you, and I could marry you. Oh, I want to marry you all right. We'd raise some money from somewhere, go abroad until things had blown over, then come back and settle down and raise a large family." He chuckled. "Keep you safe at home and out of harm's way, eh ?"

When he talked to her coarsely and half brutally she was conscious of his power over her ; when he came to her depressed and worried he awoke in her a sense of maternity which she had never realized she possessed. To see him working out his assets and contrasting them with his debts, using a very small stub of pencil and an inadequate scrap of paper, roused in her an overpowering tenderness towards him.

"Six and seven are thirteen, and eight's twenty-two, and twenty-two and fourteen's thirty-eight—oh, damn and blast it !—what's the matter with the thing ? That's not right—God, Alicia, I'm in a devil of a mess ! Not got the faintest idea where the money's coming from—oh, gush !" Then he would grin, suddenly cheerful, and say, "Let's take a fresh bit of paper and start again, shall we ? May come out better this time. Anyway, I've got a cert for the Lincoln that 'ul put me on the right side."

One afternoon, when they sat in the little shooting-lodge, where the table was littered with Roger's cigarette-ends, and the air thick with tobacco-smoke, Alicia, laying her hand on his, said :

"Roger—let me give you some money. I've plenty."

He pursed his lips. "Oh, damn it—take money from you? I dunno about that. Not a very nice idea, eh?" "Lend it, then?"

He twisted his good-looking face, flushed with his mathematical exertion, into a grin. "To salve my conscience, what?"

"To ease my mind. I hate to see you worried, Roger."

"Do you? Do you really?" He stared at her, and, to her surprise, she saw that his eyes were filled with sudden tears. "I believe that you do. I say, it's marvellous that you do honestly love me. I can't think why. I'm not much good. Lazy, good-for-nothing, inefficient, bad-tempered and bloody coarse. Alicia, you're marvellous. You do—matter terribly. I—I don't believe—I could ever do without you. I shan't have to, shall I?"

Holding his face between her hands, she said softly, "Never—unless you tire of me."

"Tire! You blessed idiot, how could I? The grandest woman I've ever known—the loveliest. I say—no, don't take your hands away, I like to feel them against my cheeks—I'll try to be better-tempered. Honestly I will. I know what a bad-tempered swine I am sometimes. You're so patient with me. I'd like—I'd like—" he stumbled over the words—"I'd like to be worthy of you, kinder, more considerate."

"My dear—you are all I want."

She lent him money; he made out elaborate notes of hand, and when there were any winnings, which was not often, he even tried to save a percentage to hand back to her. He might boggle at many things, live his life in a perpetual muddle, but essentially he tried to be honest in his dealings with Alicia. He had no scruples concerning his life with her. Louis Silver, Roger Bendish felt, must take his chance as did other husbands. If a man could not hold his wife, then someone else came along and profited by the fact. His morals were easy, his love

sincere, and he refused to look into the future except when he was forced to do so. In those moments he saw Alicia at Bendish Place, though what means were actually to bring her there did not worry him. Somehow, some way, some time, things would come right for them both, and Roger Bendish found that assurance comforting.

III

Louis Silver had dressed early, and slipped up to his mother's room before joining Alicia to drive over to the Gantons' dance. Jane welcomed him, made him sit down in her most comfortable chair and prepared to mix him a drink.

"'Ave a whisky-and-soda, Loo dear? Yes, do—do you good. You're looking washed out. Too thin! I oft-times think as that chef of yours 'ud do better to gi'e you summat plainer in the food line."

Louis nodded. "I've thought the same myself."

Jane set the whisky-and-soda down at his side, settled herself in her own chair and with hands on knees watched him intently.

"You're over-thin, Loo. Doesn't—" she paused for a second, it was always difficult to refer to her son's wife by her Christian name—"Alicia think that?"

"Alicia dislikes fat men," Louis said.

His mother answered a trifle sharply, "Then bi that she ought to just about worship you, Loo dear."

"You have no proof that she doesn't."

"Loo, what's the good of making gams? I've got eyes i' my 'ead. Tell me—let's talk sense, Loo—what made you marry 'er? P'r'aps I've no right to ask that. I ask it just the same. No need for you to answer if so be you don't wish to."

She saw his sensitive mouth twist into something which might have been a smile, but which looked to Jane Silver

more like a sneer. For a moment he did not speak, then, his words coming slowly and distinctly, as if he enunciated each one with conscious effort, he said :

"The first suggestion that I should marry Alicia came from—Marjorie."

Jane started. "Our Margie? Loo, whatever are you saying?"

"Didn't you know? No, how should you? Marjorie and Alicia were at school together—before my father died. Do you remember that last holiday in Cornwall—or was it Devon? Marjorie confided to me one day that she hoped I would marry a girl called Alicia Waldon, because she was the loveliest girl Marjorie knew. I was, incidentally, the nicest boy. She felt that we should make an ideal pair."

"Loo, you're making fun again!"

"On the contrary, I'm desperately serious. I met Alicia, and—remembered what Marjorie had said. If I did not feel that she was actually the loveliest girl in the world, I felt that she was the—most suitable. Hence your daughter-in-law."

"Well!" His mother still looked puzzled, as if unable to decide if he spoke the truth. Then her face clouded a little and she sighed. "That's the first time you've ever spoke of our Margie, Loo," she said. "I always felt as it 'urt you overmuch, so I never spoke her name to you."

He stood up, drank the remainder of his whisky, then stooped and kissed his mother.

"Hurt?" he said. "I suppose at one time it did. It all seemed such a waste. I hate waste. But as for hurting—I've no time to allow myself to be hurt these days. Good night, Mother; sleep well."

She watched him go, thought how beautifully his clothes fitted, what a success he had made, and then, glancing round the comfortable room, let her mind wander to Carrick itself. That splendid house, with grounds where she could walk long enough to get really tired—all

belonged to her son. Her younger son—only twenty-seven now.

Her mind turned to David, still living in Longland's Road, with Gracie—what a good girl too!—and their two children, the younger only three months old, and a splendid baby, if ever there was one. David was comfortably off; he'd bought a Baby Austin last year. It was nothing like Louis' Wolseley, of course, but David said luxury cars were not for him. A real good boy, David; pity that his hair was thinning so quickly, and that he was losing his figure, but a real good boy. Not making the amount of money that Louis made, of course, but somehow contriving to look a lot better on what he did earn. Somehow things were going hard with Loo; he seemed tired and dispirited. Certainly that wife of his did nothing to make his life pleasant; always crowding the place with her friends. "Where does Loo's friends come in, I wonder?" Mrs. Silver asked herself bitterly. "I've never seen a sign o' any on 'em."

Glancing from the car towards his mother's windows to make sure that she was not standing there expecting him to wave to her, Louis drove off to Ganton with Alicia. As they sat there, side by side, it struck him that they were virtually strangers. He knew nothing of what went on in her mind, scarcely knew how her days were spent; she never inquired how and where his were passed. His days! Work and work and more work. Bolstering up this concern, transferring money to another which needed additional capital, generally robbing Peter to pay Paul, and not making too bad a business out of it either. If only the men he employed had a little more initiative—if only they had the courage to act without waiting for him to direct everything!

"Damn it," he had snapped that morning to young Severn, "d'you expect me to do everything? I shall have to lick the stamps next!"

It was the same everywhere; men always asking

advice, laying sheets of paper before him, saying tentatively that they thought—or fancied—or believed. Never that they *knew*. Certainly that was what men needed for success. That was what had put him where he was—knowing the right thing to do, at the right moment and—doing it.

Alicia's voice with its clear-cut enunciation interrupted his thoughts.

"Tired, Louis?"

"Not more than usual. Bored at the prospect of this dance."

"There is certain to be a card-room; there always is at Ganton."

"That's a relief."

"Had you thought of taking a holiday this year?"

He laughed. "A holiday? My usual one, to America and back."

"I see——"

"Why, did you contemplate coming with me?"

"My dear Louis—what on earth should I do in America while you rushed about keeping business engagements?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea. And you—what about your holiday?"

"I thought"—and suddenly she was afraid that her voice was breathless, too eager, because Roger had said that he would come too—"I thought of going to the Lido."

"Original, at all events! I shall look forward to seeing your picture in the snob Press. Don't," he added as an afterthought, "spend too much money. It's tight at the moment."

Ganton, red carpets, flowers, the sound of a band in the distance. Maud Ganton screaming greetings, scattering "darling" and "dearest" to all and sundry; her husband, tall and hatchet-faced, whispering to Louis that they'd manage a poker school. Louis, following Alicia into the ballroom, noticed how her dress fell in long,

smooth folds, how white her neck looked, and how well she held her head.

'Lovely, and she doesn't mean a damn to me,' Louis reflected. 'I wonder if any woman ever will. For many reasons I hope not.'

The impression of many faces, and one standing out more clearly than the rest ; a fresh-coloured face with bright, hard blue eyes, and a little deep line engraved between them. Roger Bendish ! Louis halted ; Roger pushed forward to speak to Alicia. Louis could hear but indistinctly his whispered sentences. The fellow had been at the champagne already, silly fool. He'd probably come and play poker and lose a packet that he couldn't afford ; playing cards with money that ought to go to the butcher and the baker. Alicia was dancing with him. She moved well. She did everything well, except make a success of being his wife. Louis turned and went in search of the card-room. There was the usual crowd of elderly men. That was where he belonged now, to the middle-aged men. He'd never mixed with young men ; fellows of his own age seemed to regard him as elderly.

They played cautiously ; he became bored with the game and said to Frank Melstock, "Take my place ; I'm going back to the ballroom. Must look after my wife."

Melstock said, "Thanks, I will," and as he sat down Louis caught a glance which passed between him and old Tilney—a glance which held nothing germane to the cards, which was neither a warning nor an understanding ; just a quick flicker of the eyes, as if each questioned how much the other knew. Was that it ? How much did they know—that he, Louis Silver, did not ? What had he said ? "Take my place" ; there was nothing in that. "I'm going back to the ballroom" ; well, and what if he were ? Nothing in that either. "Must look after my wife——" That was when Melstock's eyes had flickered,

and Tilney's had sent back their slow, slightly bloodshot response.

Louis walked back down the long corridor. He felt excited, hot with sudden anger. How dared they, those two old men, flicker their eyes when Alicia's name was mentioned! What did it mean—who was implicated? As he paced along, his feet moving softly over the thick carpet, he saw a man and woman emerge from a recess and stand for a moment as if uncertain which way to turn. Suddenly the man slipped his arm round the woman's waist, drew her to him and kissed her. She made no effort to repulse him; indeed, the result of his action seemed to Louis to argue that such an embrace was no new thing—almost, in fact, a matter of everyday routine. He quickened his pace and silently drew level with them.

"Alicia, might I speak to you?—I won't keep you."

She stood at his side, white but composed. Louis felt a stab of admiration.

"Don't make yourself conspicuous, Alicia. I'm sorry to have to say 'don't' so often in one evening. That's all."

CHAPTER THREE

I

"COME IN."

She had been expecting him. All the way home from Ganton he had sat back in the car, his eyes closed, apparently asleep. Once, when his silence got on her nerves, she asked abruptly, "Are you asleep?"

"No. Did you imagine that I was?"

"I didn't know—" In her own ears her voice sounded weak and uncertain.

"That was what I thought," Louis said, and once more relapsed into silence.

Now she called, "Come in," and he wondered, rather wildly, what she was going to say. He entered, his hands in his pockets. For the first time for weeks Alicia felt that he looked really amused, interested, and younger than usual.

"Did you want anything?"

His smile deepened. "Only to talk to you. Isn't that the usual routine between husbands and wives? They meet after a dance to discuss the evening, criticize their friends and exchange whatever scandal they may have collected. I thought that it was all very well done."

"Maud always does things well—the band was excellent."

"Charming, I thought. So was the supper."

"Yes—"

"Card-room was disappointing. Everyone counting their pennies. A dull business. Young Bendish didn't show up for his usual game."

"No—"

She heard Louis chuckle softly. "Silly young fellow,

that. I hope he gave you no more trouble. I shouldn't like to think that he annoyed you—or me."

She licked her lips, and hoped that Louis did not notice how dry they had become.

If only he would stop this play-acting and, instead of standing there smiling and balancing her silver paper-knife on his finger, come to the point and say what was so obviously in his mind!

She said, "Roger? I fancy that too much of Geoffrey's champagne had taken effect. No, he accepted his rebuke quite nicely."

"Really? Well, as I said before, don't make yourself conspicuous, particularly with young Bendish!"

"If I did—?" The words were spoken before she realized it; her hands were clenched; she had a sudden desire to come to grips with this slim man, with his pale, unmoved face. He had ceased to be her husband; he was a stranger, and one whom she disliked on sight.

"If you did?" Louis repeated. "My dear Alicia, surely you never could? Bendish, who has lusted after half the women in the county, and, if report speaks truly, caught quite a number of them? I give you credit for better taste. Surely a woman of your mental attainment asks more than beef and brawn, blue eyes and—well, other less mentionable attributes. Well, good night, sleep well."

In his own room, he took off his coat, put on a dressing-gown and sat down to think. What fools women were! Alicia, licking her lips, her hands clenched so that he could see the knuckles white, stumbling over her words, asking, "If I did—?" in a breathless voice which gave her away as completely as could have done the admission, "I have made myself conspicuous."

How far had she gone? Was it a stupid, rather undignified flirtation or was she Bendish's mistress? Without emotion, he tried to recall anything which might help him come to a conclusion. Whichever way you

looked at it the whole thing was annoying. He was too busy at the moment to watch Alicia. He disliked the idea of employing private detectives, and he disliked still more the thought that if she had been unfaithful probably half the county knew, and sniggered that Louis Silver couldn't hold his wife. He snapped his fingers irritably.

'Damn it, why Bendish of all people? Why begin this nonsense on her own doorstep, or more correctly on mine?'

'If it were true,' he mused, 'how far would it affect me? Should I mind particularly, except inasmuch as it all affects my own sense of dignity? I don't love Alicia; she doesn't love me. The only thing she can give me is children, and, if this thing is true, if it's more than a flirtation, that's out of the question. I've no fancy for being saddled with some brat of his! Yet, I'm fond of Carrick; I'd like to have someone who'd take it over from me when I'm finished with it; but I'll have no doubts as to the father of any child who inherits my house and my money; no sniggering laughs, no furtive glances to make certain that the child doesn't resemble this man or that! I suppose I must do something about it. Have her watched, keep my own eyes wide open, notice expressions, a hundred things.' He rose suddenly and began to pace the room impatiently. 'Damn it, I've not got sufficient time. I want and need every ounce of energy to pull me through this confounded slump. I'm tired to death; everything's an effort—the restaurants, the book-making, the fruit business—a thousand and one other things. All making demands on me, all my responsibility, and Alicia spending money right and left—both of us spending, spending, spending because it's—the right thing to do. Oh, let her go to Bendish if she wants to! Let her take her fun where she finds it; what the devil does it matter to me? If it's nothing it will blow over, and she'll come back ready to be amenable. If it's serious, if things get too obvious, I can divorce her and

start again with some other woman. It wasn't too difficult to persuade Alicia to marry me ; there ought to be as good fish in the matrimonial sea, if the bait's sufficiently valuable.'

So Alicia Silver, after a short period of excessive caution, again began to meet young Bendish every day, to lie in his arms and allow herself to be swept off her feet by his love-making. Bendish reassured her, giving a dozen reasons to prove that Silver suspected nothing.

"If he'd known he'd have twisted our tails quickly enough. He's that sort. Couldn't have resisted doing it. That guff in your bedroom after Maud Ganton's dance was pure bluff. I'll admit I was a fool; I'd had too much champagne ; it was damned silly of me, but"—and he grinned in a way which endeared him to her—"you're a lovely woman, darling, and the temptation was too strong. Anyway, lots of men kiss women at dances ; it's something that's more or less accepted. It's all right, I swear to you ; I know that it is. If he knew everything—every damned thing—it would still be all right. We'd get married and live happily ever after, only I'd like to get my debts squared off first. And, candidly, I'd rather not face living at Bendish, with you—and my respected parent. His temper, his table manners, his voice—every damned thing about him annoys me, and I'll swear they'd annoy you, my sweet. Just let's hang on and congratulate ourselves on our good luck and cleverness, eh ?"

"Perhaps you're right——"

"Of course I'm right," Roger boasted. "I'm always right !"

II

Louis Silver had never worked so hard. He had never found life such a difficult business. He reminded himself that in those early days he had been able to face

losing his job, go round looking for work, because there was so little to lose or gain either way. Now, rich, successful, with a hundred irons in the fire, everything had become more complicated. Somewhere, years ago, he had read a poem in which occurred the line, "When the angels fall, they fall so far". That was his position now ; he had so far to fall—if he fell.

Then, to reassure himself, he repeated that a fall was impossible. That was the benefit of having your money in a dozen concerns—some of them were bound to make money, some of them *must* recover, be caught on the wave of prosperity again, and lift him out of the danger zone.

Even now, three of the restaurants paid well enough. Unfortunately, Silver's Washing Powder had dropped, due to a new firm which apparently had thousands to spend on advertising and had instituted a "great gift scheme". Severn and Beman had also dropped badly ; the street-corner business—dropped for a time and then reinstated—had fallen off because men couldn't afford to plunge when "tanners" were scarce. Cohen wanted to buy the fruit business—he'd done well, had "Money" Cohen ; clever as paint he was.

Louis knew that he wanted the money ; knew too that Cohen's price was just and fair. There was no need to quibble and argue. The money would be paid—and paid on the nail. Yet he was disinclined to part with the business which had been the foundation of his fortunes. He thought of Fosdick's as his mascot, knew that there was a queer superstitious idea at the back of his head that when Fosdick's prospered the rest of his concerns followed suit. Well, Fosdick's did prosper, and so the other concerns would, *must*, pick up. No, he would hang on to Fosdick's ; Cohen must be content with his present position. Louis sat in his large, comfortable office, so complete with its telephones, dictaphones and the half-dozen other contrivances designed to make work easier and more efficient. He ran his fingers along the top of

his polished desk, finding pleasure in the smooth, shining wood. He felt the thick pile of the carpet under his feet, leaned back in the chair which had been specially made for him, recalling the price which he had paid for it. He noted the various cabinets where his private papers were kept. Like everything else, he had said, when they were bought, "I want the best—nothing else will do for me, remember." They were the best that money could buy, as were his patent calendar, his inkstand, his pens and paper. When Cohen had first seen that private office he had pursed his full lips and whistled.

"'Cohlt a pretty penny, Mr. Thilver, eh ?'"

"It pays. Gives confidence. 'If' Silver can afford that office, then there's money in Silver's concerns! You see that?"

"Thee it? Yeth and no. Might make folks thay, 'Thilver's got to make a splash to gain our confidenth,' eh ?"

"It might—but it never does."

Now Louis found himself tired, almost exhausted with the amount of work which he had to face. Allowing his eyes to rest on the furniture which had cost so much, he wondered, 'What will it fetch?' Nothing ever brought as much as had been paid for it. A desk might have cost him forty pounds; it wouldn't fetch fifteen. The carpet—well, enough to say that he paid seventy-eight guineas for it; Wilkins or any other dealer might give him a third of that sum and think that he was being generous. Files, inkstands, silver-mounted calendars—sold for junk, at junk prices.

He started, laid his hand over his eyes, trying to regain his self-control. What was the matter with him? Louis Silver, with his various concerns, solid concerns too, thinking about selling office furniture! He was tired, needed a rest; he had worked too hard and too long. It was incredible that he should allow this sudden shump to frighten him. Silver, the Mystery Man, the fellow about

whom men speculated. Was he a Jew, was he a Christian, was he on the level, did he run crooked? What did it matter what people wondered? Silver always came out on the top in the end. Louis Silver of Carrick, with his cars, his lawns, his parkland, his beautiful wife—he had everything.

He had everything. Again his mind twisted and turned. What had he in reality? Carrick was mortgaged, his cars were not completely paid for because traders were always ready to say, when he didn't pay spot cash, "That's all right, Mr. Silver—certainly." His beautiful wife—the less said about her the better. Well, she was a damned expensive luxury. If things got too bad she could go.

How bad were things really? Had he sufficient coolness to face facts squarely and try to admit how he stood? For the past weeks hadn't he been playing his old game of robbing Peter to pay Paul, and was that game proving quite so successful? Johnnie Morley had written again, stating that sales were dropping; that the canvassers came in dispirited, chattering about "Klenewash" and their confounded gift scheme, asking if Silver's couldn't give away coupons and gifts such as alarm-clocks and plated teapots.

"Not such a great expense after all," Morley wrote. "For a small expenditure of capital we can lay in a big stock of gifts."

Capital! Damn Johnnie Morley—where was the capital to come from? Capital for gifts, advertising, printing by the mile, expense added to expense.

Last week he had made a tour of Culver's Restaurants. He had grumbled that the places didn't look sufficiently bright, and the managers had pulled down the corners of their mouths. People wanted chromium plate, new-fashioned chairs and tables, crooners and bands, novelty acts and a thousand things.

"They come here to eat, don't they?" Silver asked.

"Or do they want a music-hall show and cinema combined?"

Dick Thruston, at Bradford, nodded and said, "That is just about what they do want these days, Mr. Silver."

"Well, I'm not giving it to them!"

Thruston sighed. "I'm afraid that Bower's Cafés will, then."

"Let 'em! Clients know that our food's sound."

It was the same everywhere; higher wages demanded, more staff, greater running expenses, more novelties; money was pouring out like water. The words of an old song trickled through Louis' head: "You never miss the water 'til the well runs dry."

His well hadn't run dry yet. He'd show them.

He picked up the telephone, dialled the accountants' office.

"Send me the keys of the safe—the private safe in this room."

"Very good, sir."

Richardson fussed into the room, fumbling with the keys, making a clicking noise of protest at his own clumsiness, while Louis drummed his fingers irritably on the desk and said: "Hurry up, Richardson, my time's precious." For an hour Louis pored over figures, statements and balance sheets; private statements and still more private balance sheets. From time to time he entered figures on a slip of paper at his side, neat, well-formed figures, legible and even. Once he stopped, took out a gold cigarette-case and lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply, then laid down the cigarette in his huge ash-tray and continued his work.

Very gravely he added up his columns of figures, then, taking another cigarette, lit it and leaned back in his chair, smoking slowly. His face was white, but his hands were quite steady.

Again he lifted the telephone receiver. "Get Mr. Cohen for me."

In ten minutes "Money" Cohen sat opposite him at the big desk. Within half an hour Fosdick's Fruit Warehouse was sold.

Cohen blotted a cheque, and said, "I never thought as you'd sell it, Mr. Thilver. I always thought you felt that Fothdick's was a kind o' lucky penny for you. A mathtoot."

Louis said sharply, "Get along with you, that's all superstitious rot. My luck 'ul hold with or without Fosdick's. See my brother tomorrow about the necessary documents, won't you?"

"Thertainly. It's been a pleasant association, Mr. Thilver. Hope we'll still be—what we've always been, good friends. I owe a lot to you, and I don't forget. We Jews don't, do we?" Cohen smiled his wide smile, displaying a good deal of gold stopping.

Louis looked up, frowned and said, "We—oh yes, that's right. No, we don't forget. Of course not. Good-bye, Cohen." He pressed the bell on his desk, "I must get on, got a lot to do . . . Ah, Miss Wilson, take down some letters," as the typist entered; he repeated, "Good-bye, Cohen." Fosdick's had gone, Silver's Powder could go too. "Klenewash" had been anxious to nibble for long enough; well, they could bite this time, and see what they made of the mouthful they got. No use hanging on to things which had ceased to have any value. Powders that were miracles five or six years ago were now outdated. He'd not done too badly out of it. Queer how he first stumbled across that powder. In Manchester, when he went there to find Marjorie dead. Marjorie—he didn't allow himself to think of her very often; perhaps it wasn't very hard to prevent himself. He'd never cared for a great many people. A great many!—that was an overstatement; his mother and Marjorie; there had been no one else—only those two people in his life.

He had felt that Marjorie let him down badly when

she went off with Lennox—Le Roy Lennox! His name, like everything else about him, a fake. He'd had plans for Marjorie, and she'd let it all go for the sake of a waster who had deserted her and left her to die of pneumonia caused by malnutrition. Even now the ideas which the words conjured up made him shiver, feel sick and nauseated.

He'd found Silver's Washing Powder through Marjorie's death; it had served its turn; now it could go, and he'd be glad to be rid of it. Days passed; Louis spent more and more time at his office; he attended conferences, meetings, he lunched and dined with the managing director of "Klenewash", invited him to dine at Carrick, and felt that the sight of the house and its grounds somewhat reassured the astute gentleman.

"Confound him!" Louis thought. "I've seen it in his eyes that he thinks I'm broke, imagines that's why he's going to beat me down over the deal. Carrick will show him!"

Silver's Washing Powder was absorbed by the "Klenewash" Company, and again Louis sighed with something like relief. He was not only accumulating capital, he was disposing of some of his burdens.

Burdens! Even his mental use of the word surprised him. He had never regarded anything as a burden before; he had boasted that he never tired, that he could carry twice as much responsibility as most men. What had happened to him?

At night, when he lay in bed, unable to sleep because his mind continued to rush forward, finding solutions which seemed so feasible at night and equally fantastic in the morning, he tried to rationalize all that he had done, was doing.

He had not been sufficiently methodical in his business. Circumstances had made it necessary for him to allow himself to be pitchforked into a dozen unlikely and unsuitable concerns, Fosdick's—and fruit, Severn and

Bernan—bookmaking, Calver's Restaurants, and Silver's Washing Powder. Odds and ends! He no longer wanted interests in which he took all control. Investments—they were the thing. Sound, reliable investments, giving a man time to live his own life a little, find enjoyment, read and rest.

Restlessly he turned in his luxurious bed. Live his own life—queer phrase, that; what did it mean? What, after all, was his life except work and scheming, pitting his wits against those of other men? Not much of a life really. Oh, well, once these affairs were straightened out again he'd make a real life, begin to enjoy himself! He hadn't taken a holiday for years, except those trips to America, five days out and five days home again on an Atlantic liner, his secretary Barnard with him, taking down notes, making out schemes; no holiday really, except the "daily mile" round and round the deck, like squirrels in a cage.

The following week the takings of Calver's Restaurants dropped again. In this town a new super cinema with a restaurant attached had opened, in that city a monster firm from London were putting the finishing touches to a magnificent marble-faced caff, complete with bands and a moving staircase. Trade was bad, growing worse. Louis made over to his mother the block of flats built on the site of Fosdick's old house. Jane protested, but he refused to listen to her.

Driving her back to Carrick, Louis said, "That's a weight off my mind. You're all right, Jane, whatever happens."

"Why, Loo dear," she said, "what-ever could happen?"

"God knows—Take no notice of me, I'm tired."

"Luke's to me as you always are these days, Loo. Oh, dearie, I wish you an' me could go off somewhere an' be 'appy."

... "What?" he exclaimed. "Leave Carrick?—we can't do that!"

But Jane felt from the tone of his voice, that Carrick didn't really matter so much after all.

III

People to dine, some Polish pianist Alicia had found, with a name that not half the people who were coming would be able to get their tongues round—Zacchievitz. What a name! Probably not his own, anyway. London had applauded him, and that was sufficient for Alicia. He'd play something in eighteen movements; people would listen for the first two and then get bored, and he would continue to play and play, oblivious of the fact that no one was paying attention—not any that counted, at least.

As Morrison helped him to dress Louis said suddenly, "It would give me considerable pleasure to dine, for one evening at least, in my pyjamas."

Morrison stared at him blankly, then said, "Indeed, sir!"

"I suppose it's quite impossible——"

"It might be regarded as—unusual, sir."

"Probably. Give me my coat."

He went down to the crowded drawing-room, knew that Alicia raised her eyebrows because he was a little late. Then came the same old silly round of greetings.

"Hello, Maud; nice to see you." "How are you, Sir Harry—have a good time in Nice? Good!" "Well, Tom——" "How are you, Mrs. Tilney?" and so on, until he felt like a perfectly mechanized talking machine. Alicia saying, "This is Mr. Zacchievitz, Louis. Mr. Zacchievitz, my husband."

A small, dark man, with a blue chin and small, intent eyes; with soft, firm hands, hands which felt as if he wore soft gloves pulled over flexible steel.

"How d'you do?—my wife tells me that you are, perhaps, going to play to us later."

"Oh yes, I veel play."

"It's very kind of you. I hear that you were a huge success in town."

"Pleze, vich town? I play in many towns. Oh—Lon-don. Yes!"

Behind him the door opening, a voice announcing, "Mr. Bendish."

Then he hadn't been the last. Alicia might have spared her uplifted eyebrows for Bendish, who was now bending over her hand and muttering apologies. Something about his car; no wonder it went wrong; Bendish drove like the devil.

Bendish left Alicia and stood frowning, looking sulky, flinging odd, detached sentences at Mrs. Tilney. How much was there between him and Alicia? His arrival didn't seem to have affected her much. Perhaps the whole silly business had blown over. Louis knew that he felt a certain sense of relief. He'd no time at the moment to have additional worries to cope with in the shape of Alicia and her love affairs.

Dinner dragged, Louis thought, though the little Polish pianist appeared to find both the food and the conversation amusing. His determination to speak English led him to fling himself into the conversation, talking a wild mixture of English, French, and what Louis surmised was Polish. Sir Harry Waldon attempted to speak to him in French, but the Pole merely smiled and said with admirable firmness:

"Een Eenglant al-vays I spik zat lan-gu-arge. I eensisit, pleze."

Later they drifted back to the drawing-room. Waldon whispered to Louis, "Is it true that he's going to play? Awfully sorry, but I shall go fast asleep. Always do; it's a physical impossibility for me to hear music and keep awake."

Louis said, "Then go and play cards in the small drawing-room. The cards have been put out. I don't mind. I don't know much about music myself." Waldon's relief was almost pathetic, and Louis, with a sense of amusement, watched him scouting round, whispering to Tilney and Mellock as if he were arranging a conspiracy. He spoke to young Bendish, who looked blankly at the little pianist, then shook his head and muttered that he wasn't playing. A glass of brandy in his hand, he stood leaning against the carved marble mantelpiece, scowling and watching Alicia, his handsome face a little flushed. Wherever she went, with whomever she spoke, those hard, bright blue eyes followed her. Louis smiled and decided that the fellow was a pitiful fool to have so little self-control. If love made people such fools, he was glad that he had never been in love.

Alicia said, "Will you really play for us, Mr. Zaccievtz?"

He bowed, heels together. "Of course—hev I not sed? Eet veel be vit mooch pleasure-ing for myself ant all, zis I 'op'."

Bendish looked at him as if he were some rare specimen of a strange breed of animal.

He sat down, twisted about on the piano seat, stood up and asked for a cushion, adding with a smile, "For I am littlest of all piano men." Again he sat before the piano, his eyes downcast, his hands lying idle on his knees, as if he sought, among all the music that he knew, something which should be acceptable to the company in which he found himself.

Louis, seated in a low chair near the piano, shaded his eyes with his hand and let the torrent of music sweep over him. Cascades of notes, falling like a rain of gold and silver, with a little thread of melancholy running through the gay pattern. What did it all mean? What was in the minds of men when they wrote music such as

this? He had heard very little music in his life; at concerts he had listened without actually hearing. It had been "music" and nothing more to him. Now, for the first time, he was conscious that something new and unexpected had gripped him very firmly. The great drawing-room, with its huge candelabra and chandelier, faded away. He was Louis Silver, alone with his thoughts, trying to understand what some musician was saying to him.

The song had changed; it was charged with despair, heavy with tragedy; Louis felt the lowering clouds, the distant threatening of thunder, and through them both the dull throbbing of drums, portending disaster. It was unbearable; he shivered. That was how his life was planned at the moment; disaster impending, unavoidable. He had tried to avoid it, had even lied to himself. Well, the time was past for lying—he must face facts, comprehend realities.

Slowly he realized that a new factor had entered the music, a little hesitating melody, faint and uncertain, a mere hint of expectancy. Instinctively Louis strained his ears, hoping against hope that the new motif might assert itself. Was it possible that this music—composed by a man whose name he did not even know, played to him by a stranger who could barely speak the same language as himself—might tell him something for which he had—unconsciously—been seeking?

The melody grew, gained over the hopeless melancholy, asserted itself above the heavy, oppressive chords, and took complete possession of the music. Not gay, not charming or delightful, but bringing with it a strong but gentle assertiveness.

"Be strong," it said; "stand firm, and remember there is always hope while there is life. More—there are other things worth more than money. Beauty, love, companionship—the wild flowers, the white flecks of cloud in a blue summer sky. If you have never seen, never known

these things, begin to look for them now. What can money matter while I am here to tell you—all that I am trying so hard to say? Money can be spent, lost; you may be robbed of all you have, but I, and the things I can say, remain for all time. And so—listen a few seconds longer, and understand."

Chords strong and vital, magnificent in dignity and essential nobility, sound without noise, a rich and splendid pattern woven before Louis' mental sight. Confidence, faith, the ability to stand firm and hold up one's head in the face of adversity ; those were the things which Louis Silver heard.

The music stopped. The little Pole took his hands from the keys, twisted round and, smiling broadly, met Louis' eyes.

"You lik'—I sink ver' mooch, no?"

"It was unlike anything I have ever heard before."

"Cairtainly—off course. Brahm's talks are not other chaps' talk. Ver' cleffer zis men. Not *cleffer*—*wisemen*—that ees Brahm's. No school master—but wise, kind—like a ver' pleasant fadder, no?"

"Is he still alive?" The fellow talked as if he spoke of an intimate friend.

"Alife? No—dead longish time. Zey are mostliness dead, the best. Zey knew too much of beautifulness, zees men. Too much—vat do I say?—realization of beautifulness. When you get full of it, right up to the throat, you must die. Eet is not possible to live, no. No—all nearly dead—some von vay, some anudder. Brahm's saying—maybe—'Ach, death! Now I shall know zat alvays I vas right. All ees—deep down—lovely zings and' —he paused, searching for a word—"reasonableness.' Bach, ver' in-te-es-ted, saying, 'Alvays I hev argued and made logicality. Now let us see, pleaze, if eet ees not as I hev tought.' And leetle Mozart, zo elegant, zo laughing vit so sad 'eart often, but gent-le-man. Sayin', 'In spite of everzing all great

amusement. Alvays laughter running t'rough't all. I hop' better luck zis time; maybe in 'Eaven I vill get does goot positions like zey promise me 'ear and never giff.' But, laughing softly, Mozart. Zis dear leetle men! Papa Haydn, mit a velvet coat, ver' mooch lace, golt lace. Big vite vig, Papa Haydn. Leettle—'ow you say? —smoog, no? 'Goot mornin', Messter Angel. You kom for me? I am ready. Nice morning—like my music? P'raps my music not quite so goot as I like peoples to think, no? But no 'arm in it, all kindnesses and dignifiedness, and—yes, zome beauty. Maybe I didn't write so far—*sop*, but maybe I didn't never write so far—*down*, no?" Goot old Papa Haydn!"

He paused and laughed softly, his ugly little face shining with amusement and emotion. He had been speaking, Louis felt, of men who had become known to him; who were, with their work, part of his life. He said, "Could I find—the things that you have found? Is it true—that?"—the words came with difficulty—"the real things are not the material things?"

"Or, maybe, the material zings are not the moast necessary t'ings. It's not nice to starve vit a table fulled of meats and drinks. Yet—it is possible a man might starve joost the same. Und now, if you please, I go to bed. I stay zis night in your 'ouse, saire? 'Ow kind! I am ver' sleepy. Goot night. In der morning-time maybe I see you, no?"

CHAPTER FOUR

I

Louis WALKED BACK TO THE DRAWING-ROOM, NOW EMPTY except for Grahame Hawkes, who sat talking to George Chevour. Grahame glanced up as he entered and said, "Little pianist's a great performer, eh?"

Pouring out a drink for himself, Louis nodded. "I found him quite astonishing. D'you know much about music, Hawkes?"

Hawkes laughed. "I like to think that I do. Can't play a note, but I have the finest radio and the best gramophone that I can buy. I don't enjoy the cheap stuff any longer. The real people spoil your taste for crooners and sloppy sentiment. That's what I find, at all events."

Meditatively, Louis said, "I'd like to know something about it—only one never has time to listen to anything these days."

"Except," Chevour said, "the clicking of typewriters and tape machines. It's a damned world at the moment."

"Not too good," Louis admitted, and then wished that he'd kept silent. No sense in allowing everyone to know that he was in a tight corner.

"Where is everyone?" he asked. "I gather that Zatchievitz wasn't too great a success, eh?"

Hawkes shook his head. "Scarcely in their line. I don't mean to sound superior, but when people intensely like the sound of their own voices they don't usually want to hear what other folk have to say. They all drifted off; I expect you'll find 'em gathered round the card-table, watching young Tom and Bendish plunging wildly."

Louis nodded. Queer that here was Grahame Hawkes referring to music as something that "people said", not just notes and piano-playing, but—interpretation. He suddenly wanted one of two things: either to talk to Hawkes about music—to ask questions and advance his own opinions for what they were worth—or to go out and stand alone in the quiet of the long terrace. He hesitated, glanced at Hawkes, realized that it was difficult to begin to talk of music and ideas to a man with whom he had never discussed anything more personal than the political situation. The fellow would think him a fool.

He said, "I'm just going to get a breath of air," and walked out through the long windows on to the terrace. The night air felt pleasant against his cheeks, the smooth short grass under his feet was cool and soft. He liked the tall shadows of the elms, the rounder and more solid outlines of the oaks, and the faint scent which reached him from the gardens. Carrick, after all, was a good place. He sighed and thought regretfully that even Carrick might have to go. No use tying a millstone round your neck for the sake of sentiment.

'After all,' he thought, 'I'm not finished. I'm only preparing to begin again, and this time I start half-way up the ladder. I can get Carrick when I want it, when I can afford it.'

Hands clasped behind his back, his eyes intent and sombre with thought, he paced slowly along the terrace. It had been a strange evening. Queer that on this evening of all others he should have listened to Zaccievtz playing, that he should have been told that money mattered so much less than other and less tangible things. What did it all mean: beauty—the search for beauty and the realization of it? How and where could you find it? Not beauty which meant mere appreciation of a wide stretch of country, of trees and rivers, snow-capped mountains, but something deeper, something more

personal. How much real beauty had there been in his life? he mused. So little that he was scarcely capable of realizing what it meant. Had he ever known it—and lost it somewhere along the road down which he had come? That long-ago holiday with Jane and Marjorie—had that held beauty?

How much could he remember of it all? The touch of a child's hands in his, the glint of the sun on her hair, the smooth taste of clotted cream, the sensation of running with bare feet over warm sand all crinkled and ridged by the waves. Were those things beautiful?

Those early mornings when he had walked through quiet streets on his way to the fruit warehouse, when the air had been still untainted with dust, the smell of petrol, and the odours from passing vehicles—lorries from the tannery, dust-carts, and conveyances bearing chemicals to the works. Had those things been beautiful—quiet streets, and still, soft air? Rain on his face, the wind whipping his cheeks, the bright glint of hard red apples, the soft smoothness of peaches, and the fine firmness of oranges, with their heavy scent; baskets of cherries, cauliflowers green and startlingly white, the deep purple of pickling cabbages, onions, beetroot and soft, fresh lettuce. Had he ever seen beauty in those things? Was beauty to be found there?

Surely beauty might be a more personal thing, touching the emotions, making life very warm and satisfying. Jane's love had been that; Marjorie's companionship and admiration—these were the only personal affections he had known.

'Now, at this moment,' he thought, 'I'd give almost everything I possess to know that someone would hold my hand and say, "I believe in you, I know that you'll win through!"' Even if I don't, even if I lose everything, it would have been—something to know that I—mattered; that I had gained understanding and trust. Gained! You gain what you work for, strive for. I've never

cared—until now. I've wanted success, wanted to make men fear me, make them recognize me as a dangerous rival. I succeeded there. I suppose that ought to be enough for me—but it's a lonely business."

He stopped and, turning, leaned his arms on the wide stone balustrade of the terrace. He looked down over the parklands, where a light mist hung over the grass. His eyes grew accustomed to the dusk, his ears attuned to the evening stillness. A bird rustled in a near-by bush, uttering a quick, nervous note; delicately and disdainfully a cat made its way over the lawn, stopping once to shake the dew from its paw. From the stables came the sudden stamping of an impatient hoof; far away on the high road a car passed, the hooting of a horn shattering the silence as the car turned at the cross-roads. Louis became aware of two figures seated on a stone bench below him. He peered over the balustrade, then drew back, his whole figure stiffening instinctively: Alicia and young Bendish, unconscious of everything and everyone except each other. She lay in his arms; Louis had caught the shimmer of her dress, heard Bendish drawing long, heavy breaths, and then a whisper—words which he could not catch, but which filled him with a sense of anger and revulsion. How dared they! How dared they take such risks, offer the opportunity for a dozen people to have seen them, making him—her husband—look ridiculous!

Very slowly he took out his cigarette-case and extracted a cigarette, his movements careful and noiseless. He struck a match, held it far longer than was necessary, then, leaning over the balustrade, flung it down on the lawn. For a moment the wax spluttered and flared, then died. A sudden exclamation caught his ears.

"My God! Who's—" The rest was muffled.

Louis thought, 'She's got more control than he has; she's clapped her hand over his mouth.' He called,

his voice studiously even, "I say, is anyone down there?"

There was no reply; he turned and walked back to the drawing-room.

II

People were drifting back from the card-room, some of them heavy-eyed and ready to smother yawns. The time was half past one. Upstairs, dreaming of his music and his future success, slept little Zaccievitz. Louis talked and laughed, congratulated Maud Ganton on her winnings, condoning with Tom Tilney, but always his eyes turned from the door to the long windows. Alicia came in with Mrs. Tilney; they stood arm in arm. Louis glanced at her slippers, caught sight of the damp stain on the side, knew that she had intercepted his glance, and fancied that she flushed.

Mrs. Tilney said, "If your slippers are wet, Alicia, you'd better change them. We've been walking on those delicious grass paths in the formal garden, Mr. Silver!"

So Alicia had come back to the house, taken Mrs. Tilney to walk on the damp grass—tried to cover her tracks. Very clever!

He said, "It's rather a pretty garden, isn't it? Where are the others?"

Mason said, "We left Tilney and Melstock, with Freddie Hartley and Bendish, having a last round of 'jack-pots'. They'll be through in a minute. Ah, speak of angels, here they are. Well, who won?"

Bendish answered, "I did—for a change!"

"Did you?" Louis' tone was smooth. "Your luck must have changed."

"About time that it did."

The company began to disperse; Louis stayed by Alicia, refusing to give her an opportunity to speak to Bendish. Bendish hung back, waiting, Louis felt, to

ask Alicia, "Has he said anything? Did you find out who it was?"

Everyone trooped down to their waiting cars. Bendish, last to go, flushed and sulky, said, "Good night, Silver, thanks for a good evening."

Louis smiled, saying softly, "Don't go just yet. I want to speak to you. Come back into the drawing-room."

The fellow had guts. He did not attempt to excuse himself, but, with a sudden squaring of the shoulders, turned and walked back into the room, with its blaze of light shining through the haze of tobacco-smoke.

Swinging round, he faced Louis Silver. "Well," he demanded, "what is it?"

"I thought that you might have some explanation to give me—about tonight."

"About what, exactly?"

"About—well, do we need to go into that? Alicia, sit down, won't you?"

Pouting, Bendish said, "I'm damned if I know what you're talking about. Sounds like some silly game to me."

"The whole thing is—a remarkably silly game. I thought better of your intelligence, Alicia."

It was the first time he had met her eyes squarely, and he fancied that, although they remained steady, she recoiled as if she had received a physical blow.

"You force me to speak quite plainly," Louis continued. "Unfortunately, I went out on to the terrace; equally unfortunately I happened to lean over the balustrade; I lit a cigarette, flung down the match and heard Bendish say, 'My God, who's—' Then you—with an inclination of his head—"stopped him. I fancied that you laid your hand over his mouth. I saw you—both."

There was silence for a moment. Bendish turned and stared at Alicia; there was no dismay in his face; he merely lifted his eyebrows in question. Almost

imperceptibly, she nodded. The young man turned back to Louis.

"It's true," he said, "quite true. You can't blame Alicia. What have you ever given her, ever had to give her? Not a damnation thing. I may not have any money—you stink of it—but, by God, I know how to love a woman. Alicia knows that I love her. Don't you?"

Again that scarcely noticeable inclination of her head.

"And so——?" Louis asked. "What now, since you have confessed what I believe is called a 'guilty passion' for each other, what now?"

"As soon as you let her divorce you—as soon as it's possible—we'll be married," Bendish said.

"Oh, she is to divorce me? But I am not implicated. I have no mistress—now or at any time."

Bendish stared, his face suddenly scarlet. "You bloody swine!" he stammered. "D'you mean that you won't give her——? I mean, it's impossible."

"Quite possible, I assure you."

"What are you going to do, Louis?" Alicia asked.

"At considerable inconvenience to myself, leave here and sleep at the 'Grand' at Melbrough. I won't jeopardize my chances of—getting rid of you. No use scowling, Bendish, you should have thought of all this before. I take it that it's been going on for some time—this business?"

Alicia sprang to her feet, her face filled with anger, her hands clenched.

"Be quiet, Louis!" she ordered. "Roger, I won't have you stand there and answer questions. I won't allow him to trail dirty fingers over what has been and, still is—oh yes, Louis, in spite of everything—clean and decent. He can divorce me if he wishes to. I'll give him all the evidence he needs, and I don't think that the people who know Louis Silver will blame me so much as he hopes they will. I shall stay here tonight, but tomorrow I'll go back to my father. I won't disturb you,

Louis, for more than twelve hours. Now, Roger, go.
I'll see you tomorrow——"

"I don't like leaving you." He looked sulky and determined.

"It happens to be my house," Louis said, "and I'm afraid that I agree with Alicia—go, and go now. Good night, Alicia, I shall be out of the house myself in half an hour. Good night, Bendish."

III

He took a suite of rooms at the "Grand", and it was there that Sir Harry Waldon, half abashed, half ready to take sides against him with Alicia, came to see him.

"In a sense, I blame my daughter," Waldon said. "But from what I gather you have never found each other very congenial, Silver."

"Probably not. I've been too busy usually to make myself agreeable."

Waldon hesitated, lifted up a cigarette-box from the table, put it down again, altered its position slightly, and then cleared his throat.

"This question of . . . er . . . divorce. It's a painful one," he said.

Louis pulled a pad towards him and scribbled a note. "I'll instruct my solicitors in the morning," he said. "Who are yours?"

"Carlingforth and Walker—but, Silver—this distressing business—you can't mean to divorce my daughter. I mean—oh, admitted that she is—technically—in the wrong, but still—it can't matter very much to you; a man's hit less by this kind of thing than a woman. Presumably she'll live here—when it's over—and, by God, I hope Bendish 'ul make her happy. You—well, you can live where you please."

Thoughtfully, Louis replied, "I'm rather fond of Carrick, you see."

Disregarding the remark, Waldon continued, "It's not as though you had any very great personal feeling about it. Divorce doesn't matter for a man, or"—very quickly—"for a woman, so far as that's concerned. Only there are still some fairly narrow folks about—decent people, but a bit rigid. Might make things—well, difficult for Alicia. You get my meaning, don't you?"

Louis stared at him coldly, impersonally. "You make everything most admirably clear." Then, with a sudden and inexplicable spasm of irritation, he demanded, "Which is going to save me the most trouble? To divorce her, or allow her to divorce me? My time's precious; I can't afford to waste it running about after lawyers and all the rest of it."

"Time—waste time, eh?" Waldon looked at him blankly. Queer fellow, he was. Possibly this was a Jewish trait, this detached attitude, or perhaps the man was feeling it more than he cared to show or admit. "Why—if you didn't defend the case—I suppose Alicia can divorce you—one might almost say automatically. You'd scarcely come into it, except in name."

"Which, after all," Louis agreed, "is keeping to the pattern of the whole of my married life. Very well, Waldon, I'll instruct my people."

Waldon felt himself firmly dismissed. Silver turned again to his papers, stretched out his hand to take the telephone. It was almost disconcerting; almost impossible that a man could be so aloof. Hesitating, Waldon stood on the threshold, uncertain and even distressed. He cleared his throat. Silver glanced up and said, "Oh, good-bye. I'll attend to that," but it was clear from his tone that his thoughts had already wandered off to other matters.

Waldon said, "I'm sorry about all this. It's a bad business—"

Now what had he said to startle Silver? To make him look up suddenly with a quick frown, and ask sharply, "What's a bad business?"

"This affair with young Bendish."

Silver's face cleared; he seemed relieved. "Oh—yes, quite; still, it will be all right for her. Bendish told me that they wanted to get married. Don't let it worry you. Good-bye."

During the month which followed Louis scarcely slept, barely gave himself time to eat his meals, and those meals he had sent in to his office on a tray, as often as not pushing the food away from him untouched. He planned, tried to retrench here, to limit expenses there. Stocks were falling, his American securities—or what he had believed to be securities—slumped horribly, Calver's Restaurants either worked at a loss or with a bare margin of profit. The bottom had dropped out of his world. The favourite appeared to win every race with monotonous regularity. Young Cohen looked down his big nose, grew pouchy under the eyes, and, spreading his well-kept hands, declared that a "rot hath set in". The realization came to Louis that he was playing a losing game. Had he possessed sufficient capital he might have weathered the storm, seen his ships come through into smooth water again. He had never amassed capital; he had been too busy with his old game, making one venture pay for another. "Peter and Paul" again, and once too often.

One evening he drove home to Carrick conscious of the fact that even the car in which he sat did not really belong to him, prepared to tell Jane that Carrick must go. Silver's Washing Powder had gone, Fosdick's had gone, the bookmaking was closing down at the end of the month; young Cohen could do what he liked, see if the Phoenix might rise obligingly from the ashes. Louis Silver was through with it.

"Take what's left," he said to Cohen; "there won't be much."

Cohen, stocky and determined, said, "Why not try to hang on for a bit, Mr. Silver—?"

"It's impossible. A couple of big wins would land us in queer street."

"Don't let 'em have big bets—!"

"Then the game isn't worth playing. I don't want to win the workmen's tanners, I want bigger stuff. It's the only thing that's any use to me."

"I'll make it pay yet," Cohen said doggedly. "Just see if I don't."

"And good luck to you."

Tomorrow a huge multiple firm was beginning their absorption of Calver's Restaurants. Debts would be paid, managers retained ; even the staff were not in any great danger. The managing director of Mason's had stuck his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, puffed out his chest and said tolerantly, "Oh, I don't doubt that we can use the staff. Soon brighten 'em up, get 'em into line, make 'em smarter and more up to date. Uniforms, attractive aprons and all the rest of it. We're specialists at the game, Silver."

The price had been cut down to nothing. There was only one comfort : when Louis Silver began again, in whatever branch of life it might be, no one would be able to point to him as a man who "got out and left a load of debts behind him". No, he'd start clear, begin again with the capital of experience. That was where clever men profited—experience taught them. Only fools made the same mistakes twice.

Carrick must go. He wasn't going to begin again encumbered with a great weight round his neck. Later he'd get the place back ; it might stand empty, but it wouldn't be eating money for servants, lighting, heating, gardeners and chauffeurs.

Alicia was settled. She'd gone back to her father. Louis' face twisted into a smile. She'd have to walk warily for the next year. Young Bendish wouldn't like

that too well. He might even get restive, take the bit in his teeth and begin his old game of running after every pretty woman he met. Well, what of it? What they did or did not couldn't matter any longer to Louis Silver.

He'd done his share. While he was in London dealing with Mason's he'd "killed two birds with one stone", and spent three nights—and what utterly boring nights they had been!—with a handsome, fair-haired woman whom his solicitors had found for him. She had said that her name was Miss Conningsby-Fortescue, adding, as an afterthought, "*Millicent Conningsby-Fortescue*".

She had talked of racing, in which she appeared to be interested; her knowledge of weights and records had astonished him. She had taught him a new game of patience. It had been very dull and complicated. He had taken her to dine at a well-known restaurant, and she had said that everything appeared to be very well done. "Refined, if you know what I mean?"

Louis said, "I understand perfectly."

At the end of three days, his business being completed, he had paid her, said, "Good afternoon", adding, "Thank you, Miss Conningsby-Fortescue", and that had been the end of that. He supplied hotel bills, and various other data, and returned home.

At Garrick, he dressed with his usual care and walked along to his mother's rooms. She was seated by a small bright fire, and rose from her chair when he entered.

"Look, dear—Alicia's been here this afternoon. Collecting some things of hers. She"—Jane's voice faltered—"she hinted that—oh, Loo, she said as things weren't too good with you. Is it true, love?"

"That's what I've come to talk to you about, Jane," he said. "Give me a drink, and let's get it over. Thank you—no one mixes a drink so well as you do—now to business. I'm giving up Garrick—"

"But I thought as you loved Garrick—" Her distress was evident.

"I can't afford to love it," he said. "I've lost, Jane, for the time. It's not going to last. They can't beat me. The slump's beaten me this time. Next time I shall be wiser. Will you mind leaving here very badly? The top flat at Fosdick's old house is empty—Manningly Court. I thought you might care to go there. Rooms for we two, or would you rather go to David?"

"Eh! Go to David! Nay, I like my own 'ome, Loo. I'll make it that comfortable, you'll just love it. Mind leaving 'ere! There's nothing except my own rooms and the gardings as I like 'ere, Loo. You matter a deal more to me than what gardings does. Never worry. I can make you a lot 'appier nor what you've been 'ere. I tell you one thing—I shall be glad to see the back of that la-di-dah chef fellow, with 'is flavourings and sauces and odds and ends. It's never agreed wi' you, that fancy cooking. That's what's making you look so peeky and poorly, I am certain. Nay, we'll be all right, Loo. I declare I'm prop'ly looking forward to it. There's a pair of curtains in one of the spare bedrooms I'd like to take, if it's all right——"

He said, "Take what you like, my dear," and thought, "She doesn't mind. Everything's unimportant to her except the fact that she'll have her own place again. The full significance of leaving here, what it all means, hasn't reached her. It won't seem like poverty to Jane, because wealth is only relative. So long as she can pay the weekly bills she'll think herself lucky, congratulate herself on her good fortune, compare her own state—favourably—with that of a dozen other people of whom she's heard. She doesn't even realize that Manningly Court is hers, her own, that she's the landlady!" He repeated mechanically, "Take what you like, my dear."

His mind went back to the time of his father's death, when he had carefully and systematically appropriated goods which by right belonged to his father's creditors. Silver spoons, little silver and enamel boxes, a gold watch,

some ear-rings. He remembered those ear-rings ; they had not been as good as he had fancied. When he had sold them they had only brought twenty-five shillings.

"Where'dyer get 'em?" the stout man with the brassy voice had shouted over the counter.

"My mother told me to bring them to you, sir."

"Whatcher want for 'em?"

"Four pounds." He had wondered afterwards if he ought to have said more. The stones looked so very bright, the gold so shining.

"Four pounds ! God Almighty—give you twenty-five bob. Take it or leave it. Them stones's only imitation."

In those days fruit-knives and -forks with mother-of-pearl handles, silver knives and forks, trinkets and boxes, had been Louis Silver's capital. He grinned when he thought what sum he would now regard as capital.

Silence fell between them. The firelight danced and gleamed, lighting up the comfortable, ordinary room, with its shining, modern furniture, its bright carpet and framed photographs. Jane sat, her hands clasped on her knees, watching the leaping flames, the corners of her mouth trembling into a smile. She didn't mind leaving Carrick. A little flat would be very pleasant. Already she was planning what she would cook for Louis when, tired from his day at the office, he came home. The prospect seemed very attractive. She'd soon have him looking different from what he did now ! Decent food, not messed-up rubbish, that was what he wanted ; that and plenty of sleep, not a house filled with shouting people, all yelling at the tops of their voices and playing cards until all hours ! As for Ahcia—well, the least said about her the better. Like a block of ice, she was, with her ladylike voice, and her raised eyebrows whenever you dropped an odd "h" here and there. What business was it of hers how many "h's you dropped ? Now, apparently, she'd been trolleying off with that sulky-faced young fellow Bendish, and Louis was going to be divorced. Jane

didn't believe Louis'd ever been off with a woman! Let him come here if he liked, saying that he had a confession to make, if she cared to hear it. She didn't believe a word of it. Some scheme of Louis', nothing more, and God only knew to what ends he'd schemed!

He sighed suddenly, the sound bringing her back to reality, out of her dreams and thoughts.

"What is it, Lou? Tired?"

"I suppose so." He looked at her half dazed, as if he had been asleep.

"Yes, I suppose that I'm tired. It's a devil of a business. As hard to get out as it once was to get in. Still, you're all right, Jane, with Manningly Court, and David will keep an eye on your tenants for you."

She laughed. "Get along wi' you! Tenants! Whatever next, I wonder!"

CHAPTER FIVE

I

IT WAS OVER. FOR THE LAST TIME LOUIS SAT ALONE IN his office. When he left the building that night he would not re-enter it. Laurence Bushman, a rising young solicitor, had taken everything over, lock, stock and barrel. Despite his admirable accent, his good clothes, and his shabby old school tie, he had not hesitated to bargain and bargain hard.

"There are the bills," Louis had said; "they'll tell you the prices I paid less than two years ago."

Bushman had glanced at them, whistled softly and said, "Paid through the nose, didn't you?"

"I don't think so. It's first-rate stuff."

"It's second-hand stuff now. Not even new. . . ."

Again Louis had felt that quick rush of irritability, a sense of being too tired to argue, a longing to tell the fellow to take the lot at whatever price he cared to pay, only to cease haggling.

"Let me have your offer," he had said crisply. "Remember, by taking it all, as it stands, you're saved time and trouble, moving expenses and so on."

"What are you asking? That's the point." Smiling, Bushman had objected. Damned soft-spoken they were, these fellows; so certain of themselves, calm, good-tempered. That was what tradition did for you.

"What I'm asking and what you're prepared to pay are two different things," Louis snapped. "What's your offer?"

The smallness of the sum had astonished him. He was half prepared to tell Bushman to get out; then had come

one of those waves of intense weariness, and a feeling that, after all, it wasn't worth worrying about. Desks, carpets, inkstands, files, safes and so forth—what did they matter? He had to begin again, and it might be years before he could afford to have an office like this.

"Very good. Cash down."

Cheque-book, gold fountain-pen, figures sufficiently neat, but the signature an illegible scrawl. Bushman had looked up and smiled.

"Noticing my signature, eh?" The fellow was obviously proud of it. Conceited enough to care that people should notice the twisted conglomeration of lines and loops and comment on it. "Man once said to me, 'Can't read your signature, Mr. Bushman.' I said, 'Why should you? My name's always typed below it.' American idea that, Silver. Good one, too. After all, the real value of a signature is that it should be too difficult to copy, eh? Worth recollecting that, don't you think?"

Louis had taken the cheque, laid it on his blotter. "No one has ever tried to copy mine. Thanks! I mustn't keep you."

"Care to come round to the 'Grand'? Seal the bargain?"

"No, thanks. I've work to do."

"By Jove, so have I, but I don't see myself tied to any business day in, day out! Half the important business of this town is done in the bar of the 'Grand' and the County Club. I expect you know that. I believe in going out to find work. The man you meet socially is always the best client. You meet on a different footing. Get to know one another. It's an advantage."

"That depends upon what you get to know about each other," Louis had answered. "Well, good-bye."

He sat back in his chair—or rather the chair which was his no longer, but Laurence Bushman's—and closed his eyes for a moment. Last night he had seen his mother

installed in her new flat. She had praised its comfort and the ingenuity with which every inch was utilized.

"Loo dear, it's a lovely little place—an' not so little after all. Three bedrooms, bathroom, kitching, sittin'-room an' dinin'-room. No one wants anything mowver, surely. Leastways, I don't. Everythin's fitted in just wonderful. Might 'ave been made to measure, carpets an' all. Oh, we're going to be ever so 'appy 'ere, Loo. Not lonely neither, knowing there's four other flats, four other lots of people living under the same roof. I spoke to one lady this mornin'; she said, 'Good mornin',' ever so nice. Said, 'We're Jews, you know, Mrs. Silver.' I said, 'Reely? Well, I don't mind Jews a bit. I've known some lovely ones.' She started to laugh like anything. Said she liked people with a sense of 'umour. I couldn't see as there was anything 'umorous in saying that, Loo."

He had narrowed his eyes, wondering, at that moment, how much good it had done him to have allowed, even encouraged, men to believe him to be a Jew. He said, "Probably because a good many people think that I am a Jew. I look like one."

"You—a Jew!" Jane laughed. "That's good, that is, Loo. Why, your poor dad's father was a Catholic, I've always 'eard 'im say! That is funny."

"If you contradict the rumour," Louis said, "people will only imagine that you are trying—to do your best for me."

"Don't gentlemen like Jews in business, then?"

"I fancy that they have a wholesome respect for them."

"An' so they should 'ave," Jane said warmly. "Not time to stop for a bit of 'ot-pot, Loo dear? It's lovely. All right, then. I'll be glad when you get moved in, an' we can sit an' listen to the radio of a night. You're fairly worn out. I can see that."

Now, for the last time, he opened his private account books and surveyed his position. All his debts were paid; there would be sufficient to meet the mortgage on Carrick

for a year or two—or should he let it slide? Let them foreclose and allow the whole thing to go the same way as everything else? That was the wiser course, and meant more money for the rebirth of Louis Silver as a commercial man.

Six thousand pounds, and a few odd hundreds. His effects were practically nil. The cars had gone, except his own small two-seater. He'd kept that because it was his only means of escaping from the town, of getting fresh air and change of scene; anyway, Jane liked a car, enjoyed driving, chattering about what she saw. Clothes, a little jewellery, a few books. Well, he didn't want to be encumbered with things. When he made his fresh start he could gradually acquire whatever he wanted.

It was a bad time to make new starts; people were drawing in, not putting out new feelers in business; cutting down rather than contemplating expansion. He felt that his mind ought to be teaming with ideas, that he ought to have been looking round, trying to find where he might place his capital to the best advantage. David, a few nights ago, had mentioned that someone wanted to open a huge bakery, complete with all the latest machinery. David had said, "Not a bad investment. He wants extra capital. I wish you'd go and have a talk to him, Louis."

He hadn't gone, because the idea of a bakery didn't interest him. He had felt too tired, too listless, had only nodded and said, "Yes, I might." In his heart he had known that he had no intention of going. Damn the model bakery!

Grahame Hawkes, when he had met him at the club two nights ago, said that he was sorry to hear how things had gone. He had sounded genuinely worried; asked with real concern, his voice very low, "You've not lost everything, Silver I hope?"

"Good God, no! I've had a set-back, but I'm going to begin again immediately."

"That's pleasant to hear." A long silence; they had sipped their drinks and avoided meeting each other's eyes. Louis liked Grahame Hawkes. He might be dull, content to jog along from year to year, but there was something essentially kindly about him. Queer how he stressed the fact that Hawkes was—kindly. He had always rather despised people who were—kindly. He had thought them weak, and anxious to be "all things to all men". Firmness, ability, decision, efficiency—those were the things which had mattered to Louis Silver. Had mattered! Did matter—always would matter. Those things made for success.

Hawkes leaned forward, speaking softly. "I'm not terribly well off," he said, "but if I can be of any use—in my small way—you know that the club always finds me. I have a small interest in a printing firm. It's not—not billheads and note-paper." Hawkes laughed as if he apologized for his statement. "It's a fairly artistic business. Reproductions by a special process; German invented it. Very nice. I know people insist that all reproductions are vile, unworthy and all the rest of it. I don't see it. If a man wants to look at something on his walls he'd do better to have one of our Vermeidt reproductions than some dreadful thing of a fat child playing with an overfed pony. At least, that's how I see it. If—at any time—Silver, that sort of thing interested you, I'd be glad to see what could be done. We're growing steadily, and, as you know, there is almost always room for a good man."

Louis watched him as he talked, wondering who the devil Vermeidt might be, and what these reproductions were like. He knew nothing of pictures, had never been inside an art gallery in his life, never felt that he wanted to enter one. Perhaps pictures were all part of this mysterious beauty, something which men like Hawkes and Zecchievitz regarded as being more valuable than money. He frowned, feeling baffled and disturbed.

"What kind of pictures?" he asked. "How do you know what people will like, what they'll buy?"

"That's part of the fascination of it all," Hawkes said, speaking more quickly than usual. As he spoke a little flush showed on his rather high cheek-bones. "We—a man called Walter Burns and I—have the controlling interest. We can only select what we think people *ought to* like. Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. We did a Boucher once—it was a great success, but"—he sighed—"I'm afraid that people bought it because the women were rather naked, not because we *did* manage to get the flesh tints practically perfect. I'd like to do Manet's '*Olympia*', but I'm afraid that would 'go' for the same reason, and we should come to acquire a reputation for nudes. I once saw a Giorgione in Italy—*evening light, heavy trees*—figures that really didn't matter. I wanted to do that, if we could have had it loaned. Then I showed it to a friend of mine. You know how you show something that means a great deal to you—almost breathlessly, half afraid, because it does mean so much *to you*. He stared at it, at me, then back at the picture. 'Good God,' he said, 'you don't call that good, do you?' He got quite angry about it, kept referring to it, asking again and again, 'But, tell me, what do you *see* in it?' I couldn't tell him. Queer, how difficult it is to nail things down, eh? I'd like to do Titian's '*Virgin with the Rabbit*'—I don't know if we could, though—or the '*Virgin of the Rocks*'. It's so much better than the '*Mona Lisa*'. Oh, Lord, I'd like to do so many things—and moderns too. Really modern, almost experimental stuff. There is something in it, I'm certain."

Silver said, "What? Beauty?"

Hawkes blinked, as if he had been awakened too quickly. "Why—yes."

But the spell was broken. Suddenly he had changed from a man whose eyes held something of his dreams,

and had become once more an ordinary member of the County Club, speaking in short, clipped sentences, saying : "Well, there it is. If at any time you felt . . . Might not interest you, of course. Let me know, though, if you think that you'd like to know more about us. We've a sort of studio-works-cum-printing-press outside Liverpool. And—good luck. Sorry you're going."

II

That night Louis slept at Carrick for the last time. Tomorrow Wilkins were sending for the furniture. It was going to their sale-rooms, except for a few pieces which Charlie Wilkins had chosen to buy for himself.

Charlie, genial and raising his eyebrows at the sight of Alicia's drawing-room—Louis fancied that he recognized in its colouring and effects the hand of the celebrated Knightsbridge firm ; Charlie veering between a detached and businesslike attitude, and being hearty and friendly ; not quite certain whether he addressed Louis as "Mr. Silver" or "Silver, old man" ; only becoming completely natural when he saw a piece of furniture which he liked.

"I say, that's a pretty little piece ! Inlaid walnut, eh ? Looks like seventeenth century to me. D'you know its history at all ?"

"Its history began for me when I bought it in a shop in York," Louis said. "I felt that this corner wanted something, and this was the right size. I paid fifteen pounds for it."

Wilkins' eyes narrowed. Louis made a mental note that he had found a bargain in that dark old shop in York.

"What will you take for it ?"

"Twenty." Mentally he added, 'You shouldn't have narrowed your eyes as you did, Charles Wilkins. You've got to pay for it !'

He watched the struggle which went on in Wilkins' mind. The lover of old furniture warred with the tradesman. Louis felt a spasm of amusement.

"I'll take it."

The night seemed long, and he was relieved when the daylight came, and he could get up, take his bath, dress and make his way out to the gardens; those gardens which were his no longer, where soon strangers would walk, make alterations, and ask who had been the former owner of Carrick.

'Silver—Louis Silver. Came a cropper, and sold everything.'

'Really? I never heard of him.'

The dew lay thick, the spiders' webs, woven from branch to branch, sparkled with diamond-like drops, the air held a hint of frost. Louis walked through the gardens, recalling incidents connected with this bed or that piece of turf. This was where Alicia had demanded a little fountain, and had been angry when the workman had pointed out how far the water must be carried. That was the bed which he had wanted for Shirley poppies, and the gardener had looked down his nose, murmuring that they were untidy and difficult to control.

Louis had said, "Why the devil control them?"—but, somehow, he had never got his bed of Shirley poppies, and, until now, had forgotten all about them. Just here, on the path, he had found a bird, chilled and exhausted; it had lain in his hand and he had given it to an under-gardener named Gilkes, ordering him to keep it warm and give it some water. He'd been too busy to bother about exhausted birds himself, had forgotten its existence, and asked about it some ten days later.

"Oh, Gilkes, what about that bird?"

"Bird, sir? Chaffinch, that's right, chaffinch it weer. It died, sir. Just lay and panted a bit, then died. They mostly do. Bad to get right when they're took like that one was. I seen a lot on 'em. Mostly they die."

He had felt angry, wondered whether the man had really taken trouble over the chaffinch, whether he could not have done better himself. Preposterous ! Louis Silver, the owner of Carrick, of Calver's Restaurants, of Silver's Washing Powder, owner of Severn and Beman's, of Fosdick's Fruit Warehouse and much else besides, bothering about a dying chaffinch ! Well, he wasn't the same Louis Silver now. Everything had gone, barring a few thousands. He grinned as he thought, 'Maybe now I can turn my attention to reviving exhausted birds !'

He went through the small iron gate into the park, and turned down the path which led through the woods, past the little rounded hill called the Beacon—Something-or-other Beacon—a thing shaped like a big bee-hive, one of the old-fashioned straw kind. It was cool down the path through the woods, where fallen leaves and beech-nuts lay thick on the ground. He shivered, and wished that he'd kept out of the shadows. He'd walked in nothing but *shadows* lately ! Where did this path lead to ? He remembered—Bendish. Amusing if he canonned into young Bendish. 'Good morning, Bendish. How's my wife ?' He could imagine himself asking that.

The trees ended, and he stood in a small clearing ; woods behind and in front of him. He was grateful for the light, the sunshine—watery, but more cheerful than the sombre woods. He heard the sound of hooves, cocked his head and thought, 'Bendish for a pound !' It wasn't Bendish, it was Alicia who came riding out of the Bendish woods, sitting her mare magnificently, her hair gleaming beneath a felt hat, her face faintly flushed, her eyes very bright.

'Either she's just seen him or she's riding to meet him,' Louis decided, adding mentally that they were a couple of fools to run risks, weak fools who hadn't the patience to wait until the whole business was settled. He said, "Good morning, Alicia. You're out early."



As the sound of his voice reached her she started, reined in the mare, and said, "Oh, Louis—yes, I'm generally out early."

He walked up to her and laid his hand on the mare's smooth neck.

"Nice mare——"

"Yes. You gave her to me. Had you forgotten?"

"No—yes—I don't know." The gentleness in her voice startled him. He had been expecting her usual crisp, clear tones; instead they had a new, softer and kinder note. "I'm leaving Carrick today," he said.

"You'll regret Carrick, Louis?"

"Perhaps, a little."

"Are—don't answer if you don't wish to—are things very bad?"

"Good and bad—they're relative, aren't they? I suppose that most people would call me—broke. I'm not quite that. I shan't starve for quite a long time."

His fingers had slipped from the mare's neck; he laid his hand on Alicia's boot, and idly began to rub from the shining brown leather a spot of dried mud. She bent down and spoke softly.

"Louis—this is difficult, but it's sincere. I am sorry everything worked out so badly—between us. Sorry, because both Roger and I might have managed without hurting or disgusting you. I see that, since I have been—yes, I am—so wonderfully happy. I feel that if things could have happened without all this beastliness we might have just admitted that we—you and I—had made a bad mistake, and we could have tried to put it right more cleanly."

He said, "Is this your own private opinion, or does Bendish share it?"

She closed her lips, pressing them together tightly for a moment, her eyes cold, as he had known them so often; then, slowly, her mouth softened, her eyes looked down at him without rancour.

"It's my own private opinion," she said firmly. "I haven't talked to Roger about it—yet."

"I commend it as a topic for long winter evenings," Louis said. "I can think of nothing nicer, when the logs are piled high, than to discuss the wanderer and say how grieved you are that you ever hurt him. You're just a little late in the day, aren't you, Alicia? Don't allow yourself to suffer on my account. I'm really relieved. I was growing desperately tired of everything at Carrick."

She shrugged her shoulders, and without speaking bent to pat the mare's neck. Louis, moving back a little, watched her. She was a beautiful woman; queerly softened since this break, or had he merely never seen her clearly? Was it possible that her association with young Bendish had actually brought to light some qualities which had lain dormant? Was this how she had seemed to Marjorie, who had thought her "the loveliest girl in the world"?

With an impulsiveness rare to him, Louis said, "I'm sorry I said that. Forgive me. It was kind of you to speak as you did. Tell me, Alicia, do you remember—when you were at school—a small girl with long fair hair, rather like your own in colour, called Marjorie? She was very attached to you, though you were older than she was—!"

"Marjorie—" She stared at him blankly. "When I was at school? Do you mean in Paris?"

"No, in England. Outside Buxton."

"Marjorie," she said again, "a little girl with fair hair, who was attached to *me*. Marjorie—why"—she met his eyes, her own startled and incredulous—"Marjorie Silver! Did she talk to you about me, Louis?"

He nodded. "Said that as you were the loveliest girl she knew, she wished that I could marry you, because I was the nicest boy in the world."

"My dear—" The expression had slipped out—

he knew that; knew, too, that Alicia said "My dear" to most people when she did not actually dislike them, and yet the sound of the words pleased him. "Little Marjorie Silver. I remember. Where is she now?"

"She married, and died some years ago, in Manchester."

"I'm sorry—she must have been quite young, and—very pretty."

"Quite young and very pretty," he repeated.

"Can I say that I wish things had turned out better for that 'nicest boy' and 'loveliest girl'? If we'd either of us been what she thought—who knows! Louis, I must go!"—she glanced at the watch on her wrist—"I have to—"

"Meet Bendish," Louis said. "Be wise, Alicia, don't run risks. Divorce isn't quite the automatic business many people believe. May I say, for the last time"—he smiled—"don't make yourself conspicuous? I hope that you'll be happy."

"Do you mean that?" Her tone was incredulous. "Do you really mean that, Louis?"

"Why not?" He spoke lightly, every trace of feeling absent from his voice. "Good-bye, Alicia, you mustn't keep Bendish waiting."

"Good-bye, Louis."

He watched her ride out of the little patch of sunlight, into the dusky shade of the woods, the mare's hooves making a faint rustling sound among the dead leaves. As he turned to continue his walk Louis thought, 'I'm glad that I met her in the sunlight—in the open, not in the woods,' and, a second later, wondered what made him think anything so closely verging on the sentimental.

'Just the ordinary idiotic reaction to a pretty woman,' he decided, 'intensified because of the present circumstances. Making me think like some romantic fool and play with vague ideas about what might have been. Refusing to admit, what I've known for months, that

Alicia and I never have, and never could have, made a success of things together.'

Later that day he went to see his mother. She was still chattering happily about her new home, asking a hundred questions but rarely willing to wait for the answers. Louis listened, only giving her half his attention, his mind occupied with his own thoughts and plans. About half past eight his brother David came in to see him. Bennison's had done some of Louis' business, and there still remained certain documents to sign. David, stouter, thinner as to hair, inclined to be ponderous and pedantic, kept turning conscious and intentionally grieved eyes—Louis felt—on his brother; from time to time he sighed.

Louis said, "Why the gusty sighs, David?"

"It seems such a pity, Lou. You had—everything."

"Had I? How do you know? I begin to believe that I had nothing. Men—two of them—have assured me that what I had was worthless junk."

David shook his head. "Hope none of these super-religious fellows have been after you. Not, mind you, that I object to religion of whatever kind it is when it's sincere. The difficulty is that there is so little sincerity. Gracie wants the children to be brought up to go to church regularly, and from the point of view of discipline I admit it's a good thing; what I doubt is the actual value of the religious training to a child, particularly my children. Very individual, both of them. However, I'm here to talk about you and your plans—'"

Louis said, "I have none. I'm quite unbelievably tired; I haven't had a holiday for years. I think that I shall take one now."

"But . . ." David's face expressed astonishment. "But might it not be better to settle something first? Find a job, buy a business? To go now, to begin to spend what capital you have, may be to handicap yourself in the future."

His brother yawned. "I'm too damned tired to work again yet."

"You seem to be taking this business very lightly." David spoke with a certain acrimony.

"I hope I am. I don't want to waste energy worrying over what's finished and done with."

"I don't understand your attitude, Loo."

"You never have, my dear David."

Jane, looking up from her sewing, clicked her tongue. "Tut, tut, don't spar like that! David means kindly, Loo—and say what you like, David, Loo's fair wearied. I never saw no one get so thin as what 'e's got in the past weeks. Fair worrits me to see 'im."

When David left Louis pulled his chair nearer to the fire and laid his plans before her. He wanted to get away—for how long he didn't know; he was restless, tired of work. "Tired of everything except possibly you, Jane."

"Possibly!" She smiled. "I like that. It's a bit of impudence that is! Why, Loo, take a 'oliday, my dear. If so be that you spend all you've got, no one's got the right to say nothing. It's your own, and the good Lord knows as you made it, and got it 'onest."

Louis said softly, "It relieves me to realize that the good Lord knows that for a certainty! There have been times when I had doubts myself."

"Never talk that way!" she admonished. "Honest—of course you've been honest, Loo. So long as you can come back looking well, that's all I care about. Where did you think of going—Scarborough, p'r'aps?"

"I had thought further afield," he said. "Abroad."

"Oh, abroad. Would you like that, think you?"

"I don't know."

His voice trailed off. Despite his show of confidence before his brother, he was tired and dispirited. The thought of work filled him with disgust and loathing. Not yet!—his heart cried. 'I have worked too long,' he

decided. 'Planned and fought and striven, seen nothing, read nothing except prospectuses and account books. What is this beauty Hawkes and the little Pole talked of? What is it that Alicia has discovered through her association with Bendish? Even Bendish that night, when I tackled him, seemed to have assumed some queer kind of dignity—God knows where or how!'

"Jane," he said suddenly, "what is—beauty?"

"Beauty, Loo? Why, when anything looks beautiful."

"Tell me some of the things that have been beautiful to you," he persisted.

Her rather plain, placid face was serious for a moment; then he watched the lines grow soft, saw her mouth curve at the recollection of things which, to her, had held beauty.

"Why, it's 'ard to say, love. There's many a thing as 'as been beautiful to me. I mind once making your Dad laugh—an' 'e didn't laugh such a lot neither, didn't Dad—when I looked down at a pie I'd made. Veal an' 'am it was—cooked lovely, Loo. You know—light, a bit flaky, but not too much, just faintly touched wi' brown, and—bonny; you know what I mean. I said, 'Eh, if I were rich, I'd 'ave a picture painted of that!' Dad said, 'What-terver for? A veal-an'-'am pie! Nice that 'ud look in a picture in the Royal Academy!' I didn't care; 'e laughed as much as 'e liked; I said, 'Well, I would, so there, and a lovely picture it 'ud make too.' There was something so—nay, I can't explain—complete in it, if you know what I mean.

"Then again—eh, you'll think I'm soft, Loo—I mind some right bright red apples on a blue-and-white plate. They stood on the sideboard i' the dining-room at the big 'ouse where we lived when Dad was right well off. I kept going into the room, ever so many times of a morning, just to look at them. There was a little yellow curl at the back of Margie's neck when she was a baby; I loved to touch it with the tip of my finger. Then I 'ad a tea-cup,

when I was a little girl—white with a bright green band edged with gold ; the china was very good, glossy an' shiny. I uster think when I supped my milk out of it that the white cup, and the green band and the gold, and the nice creamy milk, made a lovely thing to look at. I uster polish that gold rim with my 'andkerchief. That was 'ow I broke it. Polishing it, and dropped it. I did cry. Not just for the cup, but because I'd never see it all like it had been again. Silly things, Loo—but nice to remember, eh ?"

Two days later Louis drove away from the block of flats which had once been Bert Fusick's house, turned his car towards the south and left the big grimy town behind him.

He was excited ; somewhere a youthful spirit stirred in him. He was setting out on an adventure, seeking new lands—new to him at least. He had no settled plans, no decided route ; he was as free as the wind. Over the Channel, on that at least he decided ; he had seen nothing of France, except on his honeymoon and once or twice when, returning from America, he had gone to Paris for a brief couple of days after leaving Cherbourg. Now he wished to avoid the towns, longed for the country, for quiet and peace. The events of the past few months had left their mark on him. He was haggard, his eyes were heavy, and the high cheek-bones stood out gaunt and distinct. He looked years older than his real age ; already the hair on his temples was tinged with grey, and there were heavy lines graven at either side of his mouth. The mouth itself twisted downwards at the corners, giving his face an expression as if he sneered a little at everything.

There had always been a certain bitterness in his conversation, as if he discounted those traits which were accounted admirable by others. He had trained himself to be hard, believing that hardness made for safety, holding that to be safe and strong a man must avoid sentiment or any kind of softness.

As he drove down the Great North Road he looked back

at the various outstanding points in his career. Again and again he had forced his way forward, if not by actual dishonesty, at least by means which would not bear too close inspection. Fosdick and the fruit trade, the shops and his own venture of the barrows, Fosdick's death and the will—were all things on which, Louis felt, Waldon, Chevour, and even young Bendish, would have felt strongly, and would have certainly condemned and detested. Well, if he had transgressed against social laws it was because society itself had forced him into a position where, in order to advance, he had been obliged to fight with whatever weapons came to his hand. To make headway in the world meant that you must have might on your side. Money was power ; without money you were a nonentity ; with it doors opened to you, opportunities were offered to you. Money meant progress ; lack of it limited you, dragged you back from even the slight vantage point you had gained.

Gained. At the word his mind twisted suddenly. What, with all his money, had he gained ? A house filled with furniture, Alicia—her body at least—high-powered and luxurious cars, friends—. Again that queer sense of lightness flooded his brain. Friends ? Who were they ? Since it had become known that he had failed, how many people had taken the trouble to come and see him ? How many of the men he had entertained and fed, to whom he had offered choice wines, had even spoken to him that last time he entered the club ? Only one—Hawkes, a man for whom Louis had never entertained a very high regard. The rest—he remembered how engrossed they had been in their newspapers, how they had been staring so intently at the tape that they had not seen him pass, how—had he met them face to face—they would have nodded briefly and—he felt certain—hurried off to some fictitious appointment.

Only Hawkes had stayed to talk to him, only Hawkes had offered a suggestion regarding the future. Hawkes

and—Louis Silver's lips twisted—Alicia. Queer that Alicia, whom, during the past months, he had come to dislike as cordially as he felt she detested him, had spoken so gently and kindly. Nice that she remembered Marjorie. He could still hear the sound of her voice when she said, "Marjorie—Marjorie *Silver*!" Vaguely he wondered if Marjorie would have been pleased to know that she was still remembered by "the loveliest girl in the world".

Queer, that meeting with Alicia had been. There was something faintly piquant—or perhaps the word "pungent" conveyed the sensation better?—in meeting your wife on her way to her lover, while she was in process of divorcing you for technical adultery. What nonsense the whole business was! He had never felt the slightest desire to lay even his hands on that handsome, affected wench with whom he had spent three nights in an hotel. Why couldn't people rebel against laws which were so obviously clumsy, which led to their being circumvented, caused waste of time, money and—cheating? He had made a deed of partnership with Alicia. It hadn't proved satisfactory. Why was it necessary to have all this elaborate machinery to deal with a private partnership and its dissolving? For another year Alicia remained—virtually—his wife. For another year she and Bendish must "watch their steps", must adopt in public an attitude towards each other which everyone must know was artificial. Of course the whole county knew that she'd been his mistress, had probably known it for months, long before her husband discovered the fact. Riding through damp woods, meeting, clasping hands, separating with regret, unsatisfied and robbed of natural actions, might make the affair moreromantic, but it must inevitably become damned tedious.

Perhaps neither Alicia nor Bendish would mind. They were both idle people; these clandestine meetings might give them something to do, add a new zest to life—

as interesting, at least, as some new card game. Bendish would meet her, sit there on his great raking horse, try to think out new things to say, grow sulky, and eye her hungrily. Louis couldn't imagine Bendish taking easily to restricted intimacy, couldn't see him being circumspect and automatically careful. A man who couldn't resist catching a woman in his arms in the corridor of a country house, who sneaked out with her into a dark garden, and almost shouted his protest at an interruption to his love-making, wasn't going to take kindly to the limitations imposed by that somewhat nebulous being known as the King's Proctor.

No—and again his lips twisted—he didn't see that particular path of true love running very smoothly. Not that it was any business of his how it ran, neither was it any matter of concern to him what happened to either of them. True, there had been one moment, after his meeting with Alicia, when he felt a sudden rush of sentiment. He had despised himself, and sought to find a satisfactory reason for it.

In his own mind he felt as much divorced from her as if the whole case were finished and over, and he had been legally convicted of infidelity. Queer to think that not very long ago he had walked into her bedroom when he wished, had been in a position to say that he was jealous of his brother David, adding, "You must give me a son, Alicia." Carrick had been "our house", "they" had entertained, people had invited them to dine and sleep, given them adjoining rooms with communicating doors. That association had gone with Carrick and everything else that had once been Louis Silver's.

II

The autumn was merging into winter, the trees were stripped; in the early mornings thin filins of ice lay in the

ditches at the roadside. As he drove over the country roads he could hear the ice cracking as the tyres passed over it. The mornings were cold ; often there was a light mist hanging over the fields, a mist which the slanting rays of the sun dispelled, when the forms of the grazing cattle showed up suddenly with an almost startling distinctness.

Louis drove slowly, watching everything. It was all new and strange to him—the long, straight roads, the canals, the shape of the houses, the little inns where he stayed for the nights, and where the food was so unexpectedly good and varied. For two months he had been driving about France, making no plans, writing no letters, contenting himself with an occasional postcard to his mother. He spent very little money, he was satisfied with the more modest kind of hotels, and the simplicity of the bedrooms and their furnishings did not trouble him at all. He was losing some of his weariness, finding that his interest grew daily, that his perception was keener and that he noted things with greater appreciation. Again and again he watched the sun rise, saw the dawn come up, touching the world with gentle, rosy fingers ; he saw sunsets when the whole sky seemed lit with flaming torches, when great trails of bright orange wandered across the sky, appearing and disappearing behind the dark clouds of the coming night. He saw misty fields, remote hills, rivers where the water rushed and foamed over boulders, or flowed gently and silently down to the sea. Again and again he asked himself if these things were part of the beauty of which Hawkes and Zaccievtz had spoken. He could appreciate the fact that sunsets, dawns, rivers, hills and misty low-lying fields might be pleasant to look at, but that any of these things could materially affect his life, or that of any reasonable human being, seemed not only improbable but—to Louis Silver—incredible.

In one of the village inns where he stayed for a few days he met an English artist who was making studies

for some travel book. He went out early with his portable easel and his paint-box, returning in time for dinner with sketches of fields and bits of village architecture. Nice little things, they were, although privately Louis thought them too "washy", yet sufficiently pleasant. They'd probably help to sell the book. He wondered what some firm were paying the chap for his work. He didn't look as if he got much. His clothes were shabby and his boots not too good. It was not much of a life, painting on commission like that.

One evening they sat in the big kitchen with its red brick floor, its great scrubbed table, and heavy beams from which hung bunches of dried herbs. The artist was short of tobacco. The kind of man, Louis thought, who would always be short of something when he met his own countrymen in a foreign land. Matches, soap, razor-blades, writing-paper—the list would be endless. Weak face, not so much a real cadger as one totally unable to think ahead and budget for his wants.

"Thanks." He took Louis' pouch and sniffed the tobacco with appreciation. "That's a godsend to me."

"Take the lot. I can smoke the French stuff."

"It's too good of you." ("Too good!"—silly expression; the kind of thing women said.) Then, "I saw your car outside. Are you doing a tour?"

"Taking the first holiday for years," Louis said.

"Really!" The artist leaned forward, over-intent and anxious to show interest. Longing to talk, Louis thought, sick of being alone. "That's amusing. You know France well? What! Not at all. I say!" He laughed—an unexpectedly high-pitched sound. "Fancy! Some lovely country round about. The early mornings might be Corot's painting dropped down for us to see. Don't you agree?"

"I might, if I knew who Corot was or is. I don't."

Wide eyes, mouth a little open. "You mean that, or are you pulling my leg? You do mean it! Do you like it?"

"I think I'm growing just a little tired of it. I've been south, and now I want to go further east. I should like to see the mountains. The very high ones. Are they?"—momentarily he hesitated—"are they very beautiful?"

The other man spread his hands, as if he disclaimed any right to pass an opinion on the mountains. "I suppose so. White against bright blue. To me it's such a very obvious combination of colour. In spring the lower slopes are wonderful. Flowers, gentian, orchis—all kinds. It's all worth seeing. Some of the villages, the costumes, the little churches and wayside shrines—yes, they're beautiful, in their own individual way. Lovely, perhaps, rather than strictly beautiful. I think that taken in conjunction one with another—peasants, home-coming dun-coloured cows with their bells, the overhanging eaves of the roofs, the smell of wood-smoke—yes, it's the combination of sight and sound and scent that make up the real beauty of it all. That's what I found."

Louis nodded. "I'll go and see for myself."

"Where?" Again that eagerness. The chap didn't want him to go to bed and leave him to a lonely evening. "Switzerland? It's so—so tidy." He wrinkled his long, sensitive nose. "It's so conscious of its success, of its reputation, its vaunted mountains and its winter sports. I like Austria better—the country round Innsbruck as far as within a few miles of the Brenner; or the road which lands you over the Simplon in Italy."

Louis stared at him. "You know it all, eh?"

"I've been over most of it pretty thoroughly, yes."

"And you're an artist. You like beauty, eh?"

"Well, naturally. I mean—" again that high, excited laugh—"that's why I wanted to be an artist, of course."

"How much longer do you want to stop here? How many more pictures have you to do?"

"As a matter of fact, I finished today. That little church over at the next village—Donnier—was the last.

I want to pack them up and send them off to the publishers tomorrow. They'll make their selection. They may have another commission for me. I hope so. Perhaps to do some of the Adriatic coast."

Louis got up, stood with his back to the fire, frowning and intent. He was going to give way to an impulse. He was going to ask this shabby, long-nosed, rather weak-chinned artist to come with him. He wanted to know what struck other men as—lovely, beautiful. He wanted to have someone who would prevent him from wasting his time, wanted someone who could act as director—without being an actual guide. More, he was growing just a little lonely, just a little tired of making out with his very limited French.

He said, "Look here, come with me. The Adriatic—that's Italy, isn't it? It's on your way if this job comes off. I'll pay the hotel bills for both of us, and give you what equals a pound a week. You can do the talking for both of us at hotels where we stay. You'll have plenty of time for painting if you want to, and prevent me from getting to places which have nothing to commend them. What d'you say?"

"Say?" The other stared at him in astonishment. "Well, it's a marvellous thing! It's an—an opportunity. I haven't a lot of baggage; I travel light. It's a wonderful piece of luck for me, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Silver."

"Mr. Silver—wonderful. You see . . ." and he was off, talking very rapidly, telling Louis about his father, who was a person in Devonshire, of his mother, who "used to paint a good deal herself—flower studies, and very, very good, believe me. She had quite a reputation at one time"; of his own career, how he had studied in Chelsea and won an exhibition to take him to Paris for six months. He was very earnest, and once or twice when he spoke of his sincere wish to make a name for himself there was real emotion in his voice. Louis listened without any partic-

ular interest, trying to decide if he had been wise to advance his offer or if he were going to find the young man a most confounded bore.

" . . . I only hope that I shan't be a bother to you."

Louis' mouth twisted into a smile. "I think I can promise you that you won't be. I don't allow anyone to—bother me." What queer, ineffectual words and expressions the man used! "Bother"! "You might tell me your name, if you don't mind."

"My name? Francis Verney. It's really spelt Vernet. My father's people were an old Huguenot family. They were silk-weavers. The house where they lived and worked is still standing just outside London."

"Really! Well, can you be ready tomorrow? I'd like to leave about ten, if you can manage that."

"Certainly—whenever you say. Then—good night."

The arrangement did not work badly. True, there were times when Louis grew impatient, because Verney was never ready on time. He might be only three minutes late, he might be longer; he was quite liable to remember as they were on the point of starting that he had forgotten to pack his pyjamas or his razor or his tooth-brush, and have to rush back to recover the missing articles.

On the other hand, he was a kindly young man, and willing to keep the car clean, which he did meticulously, and with immense care. His knowledge of even the most simple mechanical process was nil, and once when they sustained a puncture Louis was roused to the last state of acute irritation by the way Verney stood fluttering his hands and declaring at intervals, while Louis wrestled with stiff screws, "I simply cannot understand it all!" or, "This is all so mysterious to me!" His French was fluent, and his German sufficient; he was good-tempered and appreciative, and there were moments when he talked interestingly and well of what they saw. He never called Louis anything other than "Mr. Silver", never attempted

to put their acquaintanceship on anything but an impersonal footing, never assumed that Louis wished to be accompanied when he went out walking, and, without question, accepted whichever hotel Louis chose.

It was towards the end of November when they came to Innsbruck. The mountains, snow-capped, looked down on the town, the shops were bright with the promise of Christmas already evincing itself in the toys and brightly coloured wooden figures. After their long drive the town felt warm and hospitable to Louis Silver. He had regained some of his old energy and vitality, and knew that his mind was already occupied with the problems of his future. His outlook was hopeful. He had no illusions concerning his abilities. He was successful, or he had been successful, because he flung himself whole-heartedly into whatever he undertook. He would go back to England in the late spring. Verney's account of the flowers in the Tirolean spring had fired his imagination; he wanted to see them. Once seen, he would turn his face towards home—and the building of a new career. What he had done once he could and would do again.

With this sense of renewed energy, hopefulness and confidence he turned his back on the small hotels and decided to go to the "Tirolerhof", which Verney quoted as being the town's best hotel.

"It's expensive," Verney said. "I mean it's—well—it's the best in Innsbruck."

Louis nodded. "That's all right. I shan't run short of money, I promise you."

Later in the evening Verney returned from a walk; his face looked pinched and his eyes were nervous. He sat down beside Louis, his chair drawn close to that of his employer. Louis looked up, raising his eyebrows in a question.

Verney said, speaking very softly, "I've heard some disturbing things. Out in the town there."

"Yes?"

"I hear——" He lowered his voice still more ; it was scarcely more than a whisper. "I hear that—Jews are very unpopular here at the moment. It's the Nazi movement spreading. I thought that I'd tell you. It might be better not to—not to—well, tell people that you are—I mean, not quite English, Mr. Silver."

"Really ? Then you have decided that I am a Jew, Verney ?"

The young man flushed. "I assumed it. Your looks—your name—and the other day when we were talking about having *confidence* you used a word which I felt was Hebrew."

Louis frowned, then laughed softly. How amusing that his old story was still accepted ! Even this rather stupid young man imagined that his arguments held water. It just showed how far suggestion carried one.

"But your name——" Verney added.

"Silver. Ah ! As a boy I seem to recall a certain Long John Silver ; was he a Jew ? No, no—that's all right, Verney. Nice of you to tell me, but I'm a British subject, travelling under a British passport. I don't think that we need worry unduly."

Abashed, Verney said, "I just thought I'd tell you."

"Very kind of you. Now any other news ?"

"Yes" ; he brightened perceptibly. "Yes, an Englishman has been either killed or badly injured on the ski-ing slopes. This afternoon."

"Poor devil. No one important, by any chance ?"

"I don't think so. They say that his wife is here with him."

"Really." The man was quite prepared to advance theories about the injured Englishman and his wife for hours. Louis recognized the trait, had noticed it a dozen times. Verney had a vast curiosity regarding his compatriots wherever he met them. Whereas Louis Silver preferred to avoid them, Verney appeared to be actually hurt and almost resentful if he could not talk to them,

could not become possessed of all the facts relating to their length of stay, their place of residence in England, their social status and their plans for travel. Again and again he had come smiling to Louis, announcing, "Met some English people. Most awfully friendly. We had some coffee together. They live in Portsmouth; he is a retired solicitor"—and he would babble on happily about people whom in all probability he would never meet again. If, as was often the case, Verney's advances were repulsed, he returned disappointed and inclined to be irritable.

"Those English, Mr. Silver—you remember I pointed them out to you the other day. Most unfriendly people. I believe they thought that I was a confidence-trick man or something horrible. I don't wonder that foreigners think us cold and stand-offish, I'm sure."

III

Louis liked Innsbruck. His walk during the morning delighted him. The little town with its surrounding mountains, its crowds of laughing people in ski-kit, the shops, the warmth of the restaurants, and the friendliness of the townspeople were all in keeping with the fine, hospitable-looking old houses and the general sense of ancient solidarity. Again and again he found himself turning his eyes to those snow-covered peaks, finding in the sight reassurance and a queer vague sense of comfort. Before luncheon, as he sat in the hotel lounge sipping his apéritif, Verney came to him, announcing that the Englishman was not dead, but very ill. Louis said, "What Englishman? Oh, the one you told me of last night."

"I've seen his wife." Verney's eyes shone with excitement. "She's quite lovely. I hope that I can get to know them. She looks so awfully nice."

Bored, Louis said, "I expect that you will; you generally do," and saw the blood rush into Verney's cheeks.

After luncheon he ordered a coffee and cognac. He felt at peace with the world; planned to take the car and drive a little way out of the town to savour the clear, clean air, and, returning, see the lights of Innsbruck from the hills above. Tomorrow he would look at the suits of armour or whatever they were and some old palace of which Verney talked enthusiastically. He was feeling a growing interest in buildings; their fine lines, the matured stone and the tracery, all made an appeal pleasant in its novelty. He might not yet have learnt to realize what constituted this mysterious beauty, but he was growing to appreciate places, buildings and scenery as never before.

He thought, "When I'm rich again I shall come abroad every year."

Still a little inclined to sulk after the snub which Louis had given him, Verney joined him. The sight of his overcast face amused Louis. What a fool the man was with his love of chatter, his longing to know these extraneous people! Then it was said that Englishmen were not gregarious! Suddenly Verney's face cleared; he sat upright in his chair, his hands clenched on the velvet arms, his eyes shining. "Look," he said, "look! There she is, Mr. Silver."

Louis said irritably, "There is—who? For God's sake, Verney, don't behave like some damn'-fool girl catching sight of a film star. Who is it?"

"The Englishwoman—I expect she's going to the hospital to her husband. Oh, she is a lovely thing!"

The woman was hurrying along the corridor at the side of the lounge. She was tall, fair and her movements were easy and graceful. Louis Silver watched her, drew his breath sharply and leaned back in his chair, his lips tightly compressed. The woman passed through the

hall, disappearing by the swing door into the street. Verney sighed.

Louis sat upright. "Listen, Verney—I find Innsbruck disappointing. There are some places further along, towards Brennero. What was the name of one the hall porter told us of—?" He paused and racked his brain to remember what the porter had said. "Where there is a ski-ing school?"

Verney said, "Disappointed in Innsbruck! Oh, Mr. Silver! I think it's a charming place, delightful. So characteristic—"

"I dislike it. Go to Cook's—cash these traveller's cheques and pack your bags. I've remembered the name of the place—Steinach. We'll find an hotel when we get there. It's a small place, I gather. Go to Cook's first, Verney."

"Very well." He was disappointed, and showed it.

Louis went to his room, flung his clothes into his cases, then stood staring out into the street below. The place looked deserted, grey and cold. He saw nothing; only the realization that Alicia was here with Bendish reached him. 'Don't make yourself conspicuous.' She'd thrown caution to the winds, and had come out here with him. He was hurt. Not dead. . . . Probably not even seriously injured. Rumours, particularly Verney's, always grew like wildfire.

He must get away. He didn't want to face Alicia, to ask after Bendish, to allow Verney to run errands for her, carry parcels, call taxi-cabs and help her into them when she went to see Bendish. He could come back later, when they had returned to England. The fools! Bendish ought to have more consideration; the man was selfish, greedy and lacking in common sense and decency. Suppose Verney found out, opened his mouth, and the story got round? Nice that would be for Alicia— He wondered if she'd blame Bendish, and vaguely hoped that she would. Anyway, he—Louis Silver—was getting out.

He wondered if there were a back door to the hotel. He didn't want to risk meeting Alicia. She'd probably be away for hours, sitting by Bendish's bed, holding his hand, listening to his grumbles, watching his scowling face. Louis couldn't imagine that Bendish would be a particularly good patient.

Verney returned. "There's the money," he said. "The Englishwoman was in Cook's changing some cheques when I went in. She——"

Louis spun round, his face suddenly distorted with fury. "For God's sake shut up about your damned Englishwoman! I'm sick to death of her. Don't mention the woman again, d'you hear?"

Verney stared, his mouth a little open, his eyes wide with surprise and a hint of fear. "Oh—I say——" he stammered. "Sorry—only she was so very——"

"That 'ul do. Get your bags down to the car," Louis turned and walked out, leaving Verney to stand uncertain and distressed for a moment, then he too went out and began to give orders about the luggage.

Within a quarter of an hour they were driving up the long hill outside the town, Louis, white-faced, at the wheel. He was profoundly disturbed, and angry with himself that he should feel anything. What were Alicia and her troubles to him? What did he care if Bendish lived or died? They had behaved like fools, taken risks, gone against all the rules of this silly game of divorce. They must take the consequences. Certainly he was not going to hang about Innsbruck, risk meeting either of them or—worse still—both of them.

'Why worse still?' he argued irritably. 'What on earth does it matter if I meet either or both of them every day of my life?' At that moment he had a sudden impulse to turn the car round and return to Innsbruck. If he did meet them it would only embarrass both Alicia and Bendish; he could trust himself to be perfectly cool. Indeed, there was no question of trusting himself, for complete

indifference to other people of necessity resulted in complete coolness. The moment passed and he drove on. The road flattened out a little, Innsbruck was left behind. Before him, like great monsters clad in white, lay the mountains. They passed through a village.

"Matrei," Louis said—"that's not the place."

Later, an old house, a level crossing, fields where a river rushed along at the foot of the little hills, pine trees, and an elaborate shrine of some saint who looked like Saint George. A bridge, a street rising sharply. A church, some shops and an hotel with a large and detailed fresco.

"This will do," Louis said. "The Albergo Gentian. Albergo—that's Italian, isn't it?"

Verney nodded; he was still smarting a little, still inclined to sulk.

"Italy's only over the Brennero—along this road."

Louis stopped the car, got out and stood for a moment before going into the hotel. To his annoyance he felt shaken, found that his thoughts were rushing back towards Innsbruck, was conscious of the fact that he was allowing them to get out of hand, thinking: 'I wonder how ill he is? What if he dies? Should I send Verney back to help her?' Then, with a sudden gesture of impatience, he turned and walked into the hall of the hotel, feeling his face tingle with the change of temperature.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

LOUIS SLEPT BADLY, HEARD THE COCKS CROWING, AND THE jangle of cow-bells, tossed and turned in his narrow, beautifully clean bed. From his bedroom window he saw the tops of the mountains change from grey to rose, then fade from rose to white, touched here and there with silver as the shafts of the sun found their mark among the snows. The sky was placidly blue, the same shade he had known as a child when it had been his mother's favourite colour for Marjorie's hair-ribbons.

He lay on his back, hands clasped behind his head, his bright silk pyjamas making his face look pale and inclined to sallowness. There were heavy shadows beneath his eyes ; the eyes themselves were troubled. His mind turned back along the road to Innsbruck. In thought he travelled every mile of the way, crossed the big square near the station, and entered the hall of the "Tirolerhof". He saw himself traversing corridors, going into rooms, up the wide stairs, searching for someone.

He stirred irritably. He was behaving impossibly, imagining himself looking for Alicia—and why ?

He answered his own question, 'To ask how Bendish is, of course. To contrive to make my voice faintly amused that they should have got themselves into this mess, to rub in the fact that she disregarded my warning, my advice not to make herself conspicuous. Just my usual charming and kindly nature running along its accustomed lines. Nothing more.'

He rose, went in search of a bathroom, and found there a little black-and-white cat sleeping on the bath-mat.

It lifted its head and stared at him, somnolent and faintly indignant at being disturbed. He left it to sleep, did without the bath-mat and left wet footmarks all over the floor. Downstairs he was about to enter the dining-room, when a stout, fair young woman came out of the kitchen bearing a child in her arms. It was very young, sleeping soundly, with one small clenched fist stretched out beyond the edge of the white knitted shawl which enveloped it. Its face was the colour of a pink rose. Louis stared at it, and thought again that if Alicia had given him a son everything might have been different.

He said, "Nice baby—is it a boy or a girl, madam?"

The young woman smiled, showing rather large white teeth. "I not spik Eengleesh," she said, and passed on with her sleeping child.

The dining-room was hot and stuffy, the windows tightly closed; double windows they were, with the space between the two frames packed with moss. Verney, his hands in his pockets, stared out moodily at the quiet street. Louis said, "Hello, Verney. It's damned hot in here."

"They have a thousand fits if you try to open a window," Verney said.

"Then they can begin with the first one now," Louis told him, and, fumbling with the unusual catch, opened a window, admitting a gust of clean, cold air. "Whew, that's better!"

A servant entered bearing coffee; she set it down on the table, gave them both a "Griss Gott", and, without the slightest expression on her broad peasant face, closed the window.

Louis said quickly, "No, no, I like it open."

She smiled and continued to busy herself with the catch of the second window-frame.

"Tell her," Louis ordered Verney—"tell her that I like the damned thing open. Explain to her!"

With some satisfaction, for he was proud of his ability

to speak German, Verney embarked on a long and elaborate sentence, making pantomimic movements indicating that Louis wished the window left open. The servant's face remained unmoved; she finished closing the window, turned, and with her head aslant listened to Verney's protest.

"*Nein, nein,*" she said placidly, as if speaking to an idiot, "*Ees besser zo—ziiss vay, ja.*"

Verney said, "It's no use talking. They close them in November and don't open them until the spring. It's their custom."

"Can't think why they don't all die of consumption."

His voice melancholic, Verney replied, "Many of them do."

Louis finished his coffee, smoked a cigarette, looked at the antique and out-of-date wireless, wondered how on earth he was to pass the morning, then, flinging away the end of his cigarette into the stove, he went for his cap and coat and set out to walk off his depression.

He made his way down a narrow path to the river. Children, passing, cried "*Gretts Gott*", but he felt surly, and merely nodded in return. The greenish water of the river rustled over the stones; the banks were covered with crisp snow. There was snow everywhere. Some children were ski-ing on a slope, and the sounds of their voices reached Louis. He stopped to watch them. They were a long way from him, but the bright, still air allowed their small figures to stand out clear against the snow and the blue sky. They stooped, swooped, sprang into the air and flew like little birds with long legs. So that was ski-ing, Louis thought. That was what Bendish had been doing when he was hurt. It looked a dangerous business, though probably these children thought nothing of it; found it safer than running or walking.

Damn it, there he was thinking again of Bendish and his confounded accident. He was allowing the man to get on his brain. Bendish and Alicia! He turned

angrily away and began to walk rapidly as if he attempted to leave his thoughts behind him.

Along by the river, turning from it to walk through a wood, he could hear the ringing sound of axes, and the noise of voices as men called to each other. Once a large yellow dog ran forward from a cottage, barking and wagging its tail. A woman called something which Louis could not understand ; the dog halted, its pink tongue lolling, its tail still waving gently. Louis snapped his fingers and it came forward, lowering itself so that its stomach almost touched the ground. Then, afraid of its own boldness, it turned and fled back to the shelter of the cottage.

Farther on the woods thinned, and Louis found himself on the road again. The hemps of his trousers were wet and clung to his ankles. Here the snow was dry and powdery, but in the woods the ground had been wet and soggy. He felt hungry, and in search of food entered the first small inn that he saw. A man, tall, broad and blond, wearing leather shorts with embroidered braces stretched across his vast chest, came forward smiling encouragement.

"I want something to eat." Louis was conscious that he spoke more loudly than usual, falling, he remembered, into the usual fault of the Englishman abroad, who believes that English spoken loudly and slowly is intelligible to every nationality.

The man's smile broadened. "Ja," he said, nodding, "Ja, I spik ver' goot Eengleesh."

They produced a passable meal ; Louis ate it and shivered a little, for the room, though stuffy, was chilly. The man stood near, watching him and from time to time embarking on some totally irrelevant phrase,

"London gont town, mister, ja ?"

Yes, London was a good town, Louis agreed

"Eengleesh ver' rich, nein ?"

"Not all of them, believe me."

The fellow chuckled, "Vas ist—'not all' und 'believe me' ?"

It was an exhausting and tedious business, this carrying on a conversation about nothing, with no understanding on either side. How utterly impossible to get any real comprehension without language, a language common to both! Smoking a cigarette, Louis imagined how incredibly difficult it would be for him were he left high and dry in this wretched village without Verney to act as interpreter. Even with Verney it was sufficiently difficult. If he were ill, needed a doctor—if he had legal documents which needed signatures, a visit to a lawyer—if anyone died, a foreigner—how difficult to make arrangements!

He started to his feet, rapping on the table, demanding, chiefly in pantomime, his bill. What was wrong with him, allowing his mind to run on such things? He wasn't ill; he had no legal documents to sign; he wasn't likely to die. This damned business at Innsbruck had got on his nerves, was absorbing him, making him weak and imaginative.

There was only one thing to do: knock this nonsense out of his mind, prove to himself that he didn't care; that what happened to Bendish was no business of his. Probably the man was better, preparing to leave and return to England. Once he knew that for a certainty, Louis felt, he would throw off all these fantastic ideas.

"A car—auto—motor?" he asked the landlord.

"Ja—goot. Goot, ver' goot."

"For me—here." Louis pointed with his forefinger to the road before the house. "At once."

"Ja, ja." Widler smiles, much head-nodding. "Long vay, mister?"

"Innsbruck—no, no, Steinach."

He waited, his feet grew chilled, his hands frozen. He stared resentfully at the snowy slopes of the mountains. With much protesting, rattling and general noise an ancient car of some unknown make emerged from the yard and came to a standstill before the inn. After a

certain amount of persuasion the innkeeper managed to start it again, and they moved off towards the village, which Louis judged about five miles away.

II

When Louis entered Verney was sitting drowsing before the stove in the dining-room. The sight of him, his mouth a little open, his eyes dimmed with sleep, roused Louis to a kind of fury. He could have shouted at the man, who blinked at him, rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand and said, "Oh, I didn't know who it was—fancy I was a'most asleep. It's the heat."

"I've got to go into Innsbruck," Louis said. "Can't get any cigarettes here that I can smoke. The 'Tiralerhof' has some, and I want note-paper and—a dozen things. Come with me?"

Verney staggered to his feet, the mists of sleep dispelled.

"Innsbruck!" he said, his face clearing, his eyes suddenly bright.

Louis thought, 'The poor fool thinks that he may see his "Englishwoman" again!'

"Innsbruck," Verney said again. "I'd like to come. Thanks."

All the way to the town Louis drove in silence, mocking himself that he should have come on such a fool's errand. It was against his better judgment; he was simply pandering to his own weakness. His arguments had been specious, mere rationalizing. He was giving way to a ridiculous impulse, being false to himself and his own beliefs. If he met Alicia what could he say to her? Why should he wish to see her at all?

'Blast it all!' he thought furiously. 'Let's admit I'm weaker than I thought. Something's happened to me. Because when we last met she was gentle—spoke kindly

of Marjorie—I'm acting like a lunatic. Serves me right if I am made to feel the fool that I am.'

In the hotel lounge, he was himself again, ordering hot coffee and cognac. He watched Verney's eyes turning this way and that, smiling a little when he realized how hard Verney tried to make an opening to speak to the waiter who brought their order.

Louis said, "Why don't you ask after your lovely Englishwoman? If this man of hers is dead, I don't mind leaving you to help her with the funeral arrangements, Verney."

Again that quick, almost girlish flush. Verney's eyes were very bright as he answered, "How can you be so unkind, Mr. Silver? She's your countrywoman and mine; if she's in trouble—"

"Quite," Louis agreed; "wasn't that what I suggested? By all means make yourself a knight errant. I don't object so long as you don't cast me for a part in the play."

The waiter returned with a selection of cigarettes on a tray. Louis took what he wanted, ordered more, yawned and sipped his cognac. Verney, clearing his throat nervously, asked after the injured Englishman.

"The doctors are afraid dat he will die. All day, all night, his wife is mit him. His father, and, I believ, her father, arrived last night. Her father is a—lord. T'ey are at ze hospital now."

"I say—how awful!" Verney breathed.

The waiter nodded, "Indeed yes."

Waldon, Mark Bendish, young Roger and Alicia. A gathering of the clans, Louis reflected; then he knew that his heart was pounding and drank his cognac quickly. The spirit soothed him a little. He watched Verney; twisted his mouth into a smile.

"Bad luck, Verney. You won't see her. Still, with these Englishmen round her she won't need your help and support, eh?"

Verney frowned. He couldn't even frown efficiently,

Louis thought, only puckered his forehead and looked like a child who is going to cry.

"I don't understand you," he stammered suddenly. "You don't—don't seem to have any—any kindness in you. I think—yes, I do—I think it's dreadful to talk—like that, when people—are in trouble. It's not clever, or—or funny."

"I didn't imagine that it was either. Go and get some fresh air and writing-paper, Verney, you're getting hysterical."

He sprang to his feet, blinking his eyes—the fellow was almost crying!—then said in a tight, repressed voice, "All right. If I'm back first I'll wait for you. You said you'd some shopping to do, didn't you?"

Then, without waiting for an answer, he turned and hurried out of the hotel. Louis lit a cigarette, blew out the match very deliberately and leaned back in his chair. Bendish was dying; going to be extinguished like that match. The divorce wasn't through; it was to have been heard next month. What would happen to her? She would go home again, and in a year or so marry someone else, some other blunt-nosed, hefty, shallow-brained fellow, with a mind capable of understanding nothing other than horses, guns and dogs. That would be if she carried on with the divorce. She might do that; probably would. She was divorcing Louis Silver after all, protesting against his infidelity! The whole thing was almost amusing, if you got it in the right perspective.

He called the waiter, "Bring me another cognac—a double one."

The man returned, set down the little tray and, bending forward, whispered, "I t'ink that the Englishman is dead. T'ey have just driven up. She is almost collapsed, the lady. Ah—the poort'ing, t'ere they come."

The manager, immaculate and discreet, obviously offering condolences, was whispering to Harry Waldon: Bendish, scarlet-faced, his eyes swollen and puffy, had

Alicia on his arm ; she was walking as a blind woman might have moved. Louis, leaning back, hidden by a pillar, heard Waldon's voice, dropped to a lower key than usual.

"Thank you—yes—I shall be grateful—indeed, yes."

The waiter bent down and whispered, "Yes, it will seem he is dead."

Louis said, "Looks like it," shivered and felt as if someone had laid a cold hand on his heart.

Young Bendish was dead. He would never again ride through the woods to meet Alicia ; he wouldn't laugh or scowl, plunge at poker, make love to pretty women any more. He was finished, snuffed out like a candle ! He would never again go swooping and flying over snow slopes, as those children had done this morning. He was lying in a hospital as cold as the snow, distant as the mountains themselves. At home the local papers would have headlines, long articles about "regretting to announce", and then a list of all he had done, where he'd been to school—plenty of padding because old Bendish was important, and a long obituary notice showed respect to the departed.

Maud Ganton would scream, "My dear, it's too awful ! Poor darling Roger !" Men in the club would wag their heads and say that young Bendish had been "the right stuff", "the kind of man we want", and a number of other well-worn and untrue clichés. They'd forget or try to forget that he'd had debts he couldn't pay, that he'd made love to every pretty woman who took his fancy—it was decent to forget these things when a man died. They were all for decency, Louis reflected.

Slowly a kind of sub-conscious anger took possession of Louis Silver ; an anger against the dead Bendish, which from time to time smouldered and flared in little bursts of flame. He had had no right to bring Alicia to Austria, and, having brought her, no right to risk his damned neck skiing.

'Damn it,' Silver thought, 'I'm selfish—always have been—but I don't make other people pay for my selfishness! I pay my own debts, which is more than he ever did.'

Now she was left high and dry, compromised; not that it mattered much really in these days, but there were still some people who retained the rigid ideas of their forebears. She was bereaved; he had seen her leaning on the arm of old Bendish as if grief had robbed her of everything. Perhaps it had. Perhaps Roger had mattered to her supremely. Perhaps she now felt as Louis had years ago in Manchester when they told him that Marjorie was dead. He remembered the chill, unfriendly hall of the hospital, the crackle of starched aprons as the nurses passed, the cold eyes of some sister who had spoken to him. Most of all he remembered the sense of intense and terrible loss which had enveloped him. Was that how Alicia felt now?

'God help her if she does,' thought Louis Silver. 'I've been through it; I know what it's like—going down into hell.'

Listening intently, he sat staring at the carpet with his head sunk between his shoulders, his hands clasped between his knees. He heard the sound of hooves, the rustle of dead leaves, then his own surprise at the gentleness of Alicia's voice, and his incredulity when she said, "I am sorry everything worked out so badly—between us." His own retort, harsh and unkind, telling her about Marjorie. "I'm sorry," she had said; "she must have been quite young and very pretty." And at last, "If we'd either of us been what she thought—who knows?"

He was conscious that he was facing facts. He had done with running away from what was true. He'd been carrying that conversation in his heart ever since she rode away through the woods to join Bendish. It had come to run through his mind as a kind of melody. Not that he was in love with her—at best he could only claim a queer,

unreasonable jealousy of Bendish—but there had been regret, almost grief, that everything had gone wrong.

He had always despised people who sighed, who looked back on the past and thought of "what might have been". They were weak, sentimental and impractical. Yet here he was, going back to a scene which might have meant nothing at all, except that, as Alicia had been going to meet Bendish, she had felt kindly towards all the world, and it was—the last time.

One often grew sentimental when it came to the end of anything. He remembered when he had sold the fruit stores, had shaken hands with the employees. They had, for a moment, ceased to be the people he had called inefficient, fools and dolts. He had seen them as friends from whom he was parting. That probably accounted for Alicia's words that morning.

'Life's beaten her,' he thought. 'I can sympathize, because it nearly beat me so often. I could stand up to it—she can't; her upbringing's against it.'

It was then that he caught sight of Bendish and Harry Waldon, who with grave faces were hurrying down the corridor. They stopped at the reception desk, asking questions, turning to each other as they heard the replies. They were too absorbed to notice Louis Silver, with his head turned to watch and listen. Waldon was nodding gravely; Bendish booming softly, "Yes—oh yes, indeed."

Still talking in low voices, they turned and went out. Louis stood up; he felt cramped and cold, and rubbed his hands together to get some warmth into them. Then, sauntering, his face unmoved, he made his way to one of the writing-tables and sat down, a piece of note-paper before him. Twice he began to write, and each time, with a gesture of impatience, he tore the paper in pieces and took another sheet. He wrote slowly, in that neat and legible hand which had once made Alicia declare, "It's far too good to be the handwriting of a . . ." She has paused, and he had prompted her.

"A gentleman."

"Thank you," she had returned, "you gave me the right word." That had been in the middle of one of their quarrels, when he had flung a cheque towards her, sending it fluttering over a polished table.

He wrote :

Dear Alicia,

I am staying at the Albergo Gentian, at Ssteinach. Can I be of any service to you? I heard of your bereavement this afternoon. I am at your disposition should you need anything.

Louis.

He stared down at the note, his lips curled. What stupidity! Just once again pandering to that latent sentiment. He'd never accounted himself sentimental; always prided himself upon being cold, hard and eminently sensible. He slipped the note into an envelope and turned from the table.

A gesture, that was all, to a woman, alone in a foreign country except for two old men, one incredibly stupid, the other a muddler. That was all, a gesture, a mere civility.

When Verney returned, his face stung by the cold, he laid down his parcels and asked, "Haven't you been out?"

"No, I didn't feel like it. Sit down, Verney, you've got to do something for me. Take this note up to the Englishwoman's room. Tip the waiter to tell you which it is. Give it to her personally, or, if that's impossible, bring it back to me. The two men are out. I saw them go. Now, don't waste time. Leave the note, and I'll wait for you in the car."

"But—I don't understand—I mean——"

Louis caught him by the sleeve, twisting the cloth in his fingers.

"Do as I tell you," he said. "Ask questions after-

wards if you must, but go and do this for me—now."

Verney took the note and said, "I say—is her husband dead?"

"They tell me so."

"All right."

The cold air caught Louis by the throat as he went out to the car. As he opened the door to enter he knew his hands were unsteady. With an effort he started up the car and sat there hoping that the throbbing engine might warm him, while he waited for Verney, who came out at a run and flung himself in at Louis' side. He was shaking, his lips trembled a little. Louis did not speak until they were outside the town, then, without turning his eyes, keeping them fixed on the long road, he asked, "Well——?"

Verney swallowed hard. "She was alone. I gave it to her."

"Yes?"

"She opened the door and said, 'What is it? Are you from the hospital?' I said would she please read your note; she turned it over and asked who had sent it. I said you. She said, 'Louis—Louis Silver?' Then opened it and read it. I thought that she was going to fall; I put out my hand. She said, 'No, no—I'm all right. Please thank him—thank him very sincerely. I am grateful to him. Say that, will you?' Then she closed the door and I ran down to you. Mr. Silver—did you know her all the time? I hope that's not an impertinence. I couldn't help asking."

Louis did not speak for a moment; then he said, slowly, "Sorry I was so damned rude to you, Verney. You're a good chap. Did I know her? I don't think that we either of us knew much about the other really, or wanted to. That note was an impulse—I suspect a bloody silly one. I fancy that I'm regretting it already. I'm her husband."

"Oh ! I never imagined that—Mr. Silver, don't regret sending that note. She was grateful, I know that she was."

"Do you ? Keep your mouth shut about what I said, Verney."

"Oh, of course, Mr. Silver. Of course."

III

For two days Louis walked and tried to leave his thoughts behind him among the snows ; at night he sat listening to the ancient wireless, and heard unmoved that an Englishman named Roger Bendish had died as the result of a ski-ing accident near Innsbruck. The name Roger Bendish seemed to hit him between the eyes, to bring back too plainly the sight of Alicia, blinded with grief, leaning on the arm of Roger's father.

Each morning as he woke he told himself that he wouldn't stay, he hated the place, it didn't suit him ; he felt ill and out of sorts. He said as much to Verney, who listened, nodded, and said nothing except, "I'm sorry that you're not well, Mr. Silver. Perhaps it's too high for you."

Yet each day he found some new excuse for delaying his departure. The evenings were the worst ; they were long and incredibly dull. Once Verney suggested that they might play patience, and Louis replied :

"Thank you ; I learnt the dullest of all possible patiences with the lady who is co-respondent in my divorce case. If you've nothing better to suggest, don't make any suggestions at all."

Later he said, "I don't know why the devil you stay with me, Verney. I'm consistently rude, damned unpleasant generally. Why do you stay ?"

He hesitated, licked his lips nervously, then said, "Because I like you, Mr. Silver."

"Seems impossible——"

"Oh no, it's not."

Louis stared out of the window. Shouting and laughing, children were running with a sleigh down the street. Men wearing woollen caps with ear-pieces stood to watch them; once a woman called, bidding them take care. With a start he remembered that today would be Bendish's funeral. At some chilly cemetery in Innsbruck, with the ground as hard as iron. Only a pathetically small group of people would be there to witness a service read by some English chaplain, his voice sounding out of place and a little unreal, while broad-shouldered Austrians waited to lower the coffin.

He said, "I think we'll move on tomorrow. I'm sick of the snow." Vaguely, Verney said, "It will soon be Christmas. It's a nice time in Austria. The windows and the Christmas-trees look so charming. Almost worth waiting for."

"Another month—or nearly, to see a few candles and some stunted trees? No, thanks. We'll get on. I may feel better over the other side of the Brenner."

"There may be more people here for Christmas. Madame thinks so—she told me so this morning. Some French people have booked rooms, and she thinks a Dutch lady."

"Wild excitement," Louis sneered, and continued to stare out of the window, wondering if a cognac might make him feel warmer, less inclined to shiver. Was he really cold or was that shivering due to nerves? Nerves—he'd never had nerves in his life! He was growing imaginative over his health. Time he got back to work.

He repeated, "I shall go tomorrow. Remember to pack your toothbrush."

A car rattled up the hill and stopped. Louis said, over his shoulder to Verney, "These may be your Dutch people, or some chattering French. Now we shall taste what gaiety means."

He left the window, walked to the wireless and twisted

the indicator ; a brass band blared out, roaring horribly ; again he turned the knob, and heard a shrieking soprano, diminished the noise and found the German and rather sentimental song quite pleasant.

He heard Verney say, "Ja, Frau Bengen ?"

An unintelligible murmur of German reached his ears ; again Verney repeating, "Ja, Frau Bengen."

Then, "Mr. Silver—there is someone to see you. A lady."

Louis did not move ; he continued to listen intently to the soprano, lowering and increasing the tone, twisting the knob this way and that to gain time. Then, turning off the music, he turned, squared his shoulders and asked, "Very well. Where is the lady ?"

Verney asked the landlady, "*Wo ist die Dame ?*"

"*Sie erwarte Ihnen im Eintratts Saal, Herr Verney.*"

He said, "In the hall, Mr. Silver."

Louis went out into the hall, where wicker tables and chairs, each draped with an embroidered antimacassar, stood on brightly coloured wool carpets. She was standing, her hands clasped, her eyes very bright.

He said, "How are you, Alicia ?"

"Can I talk to you, Louis ? Not here—where we shan't be interrupted." Then as he saw her sway a little, and laid his hand on her arm to steady her, she added, "Louis—you will listen, won't you ?"

He nodded. "Of course. Come into this room here."

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

SHE SAT DOWN ON THE CHAIR HE INDICATED, WHILE HE stood, his hands behind him, his back to the window. The room was small, hot and uncomfortable, rarely used except when some client wished for privacy. Louis reflected that the clients at the Albergo Gentian desired few things less than quiet. Their idea of happiness was to gather in crowds, drink beer, smoke and burst into snatches of song.

Alicia sat with her hands clasped tightly ; her whole figure seemed to be rigid with effort. She was dressed in black ; her hair done like pale gold. She looked white and shaken, pathetic and very lonely. It made him feel strange to be alone with her again. The silence, he felt, had lasted a long time. Hours, perhaps ; he didn't know, didn't care ; he was trying to look into his own heart, to understand what were his feelings towards her. Not love, certainly—it was not possible that he could be in love with Alicia ; she stood for so many things which he disliked. She could be overbearing, certain that she and her class were a kind of Chosen People. Again and again he had heard her ask with a tilt of her head, "Who are they ?"

How often had he answered, "Just common people—like myself" ?

Socially, she was useless, had been brought up and given an expensive education which should fit her for marriage with some man possessing sufficient money. She had realized that, and married him, taking everything, unwilling to give anything in return. She was only fit to spend money, entertain, and talk lightly and easily.

People always said, "Alicia is such a charming hostess," and while his lips twisted into a sneer he had agreed, smiling, because they regarded that as important—to be a charming hostess! Silly, vapid people, with insufficient to occupy their minds.

What did she want with him now? Not money—or was that what she had come for? Surely old Bendish and her father could pay her hotel bill? Or had young Bendish incurred debts of which they knew nothing? One thing was certain—he was not going to pay Roger's debts! Why the devil should he be called upon to do anything at all for her? His note had been a gesture, nothing more. He didn't love her, didn't care if he never saw her again. Lovely she might be, charming—that blasted silly word cropping up again—but they'd nothing in common, never had and never would.

He said harshly, "Well—what is it?"

She started and, turning, met his eyes. He knew that their coldness made her draw back; she seemed startled. What had she expected? Protestations of affection, condolences on the loss of Bendish? Not from Louis Silver!

He said, "I thought you would have gone back to England—after the funeral."

"They wanted me to. I refused—I couldn't go back."

Preferring to stay and tend the grave of Roger Bendish, he didn't doubt.

"Foolish, wasn't it?"

She didn't answer, but continued to sit with her hands clasped, her eyes averted. After that exchange of glances between them she had not looked at him again.

"Louis—if I tell them not to proceed with the divorce, will you—take me back?" The last words came with a sort of desperate rush.

"My dear Alicia, why? I'm not rich any longer."

"I know that. It doesn't matter."

He laughed. "It matters considerably. I've barely enough to keep myself, much less a wife. You're an expensive luxury, you know. Besides, why? What good purpose would it serve? You never liked me; I never cared much for you. Frankly, as an investment you didn't pay any dividends. No, let the divorce go through—much better for everyone. Go home and meet some nice hearty fellow—with a public-school education and outlook; that's obviously your line."

"How can you talk like that to me——?" Her tone held no actual resentment, only a kind of dull surprise.

"How else should I talk?" Louis asked, and felt his anger rising. She was so quiet; she had made her astonishing proposal without emotion. Even his sneers had not really touched her; they might have hurt her, but she had not been angered by them. She'd lost her spirit, had allowed circumstances to beat her. She couldn't face going back alone; wanted to fling herself on him again. He didn't want her, wouldn't have her.

He continued, "It astonishes me that you can come here at all. You've finished with me. I never meant anything to you, and yet now you want me to take you back! That's part of your aristocratic impertinence! Or has someone told you that I am certain to make a 'come-back'? You throw up everything for Bendish; you allow him to make——"

That had stung her! She sprang to her feet. "Be quiet, Louis! I've just come from his funeral. How dare you!"

"I might ask—how dare you come here, to me, hot-foot from his funeral? Surely, Alicia, just a little lacking in—that god of yours—good taste, eh?"

"I'll go," she said, and turned to the door.

Louis hesitated; she was going, he was to lose her. Something in him rebelled against it, urged him to keep her, to make her talk to him a little longer. No matter what she said, he wanted to hear her voice. He sprang

forward and caught her arm. "Tell me first," he said, "what made you come here to me—today?"

"I came," she said slowly, "because I remembered the last morning we met in that clearing in the woods, then because of your note the other day. I thought that I had made a mistake, that—oh, it was so incredibly foolish of me!—you might be kind, understanding. I'd no one else to go to—"

"And so you came to me? Thank you; it's a compliment, isn't it? As there was *no one else*— Well, go on!"

"I see that it was impossible. Only when you're desperate you don't think very clearly; you snatch at anything, take any road—"

"You are—desperate?" he said.

"Yes—"

"Because Bendish is dead?"

She lifted his fingers from her arm, saying, "Let me sit down—I'm tired. When Roger died—they all knew from the first that he was going to die—I didn't believe it! Didn't think that it was possible. Death and Roger didn't seem to have anything to do with one another. His death ended all the warmth I'd known, destroyed all the reality. You didn't like him. You didn't know him. I did. I understood him; that queer streak of weakness, his courage, his determination to accomplish things which seemed to him important. Ski-ing was one of them. We had a life together, a real, actual life. Not anything which made us clever, or intellectual; perhaps it only made us selfish, but we were—happy, quite consciously happy."

"That's more than some of us can say," Louis interjected.

"*That* life ended four days ago—when he had the accident. He never spoke to me again. They kept him alive, just breathing—but his life and mine were finished."

Louis lifted his hand and laid it against his mouth; his lips were shaking. Against them his fingers felt like

ice. Speaking uncertainly, he said thickly, "His life and yours—What d'you mean? That life ended four days ago—D'you hear me? What d'you mean?"

"I mean—that I'm going to have his child, Louis."

"My God!" He dropped his hand and stood staring at her, his eyes wide, his face very white. "My God!" Then he laughed—a harsh, metallic noise, which grated on his own ears. "And you come here to try to foist his bastard on to me! Damn you both, what do you think I am? I wanted you to give me a child; you couldn't do that, could you? But you could let Bendish make love to you, get yourself pregnant; he gets himself killed, and you come here to me—talking about—that day we met in the woods, trying to make out a case for yourself! Blast you all—you and your kind! I'm not good enough for you, unless I'm filled up and made acceptable with money, until you're in a hole, then you come whining to me! I suppose your father and old Bendish put you up to this, eh?"

"Neither of them knew—"

"Who does know?"

She met his eyes squarely. "Not a living soul."

"Ah! Bendish knew?"

"I never told him. I thought that it might—Oh, what does it matter what I thought? Can that young man who brought your note drive me back to Innsbruck?" She held out her hand. "I'm sorry, Louis. You're right. It was unconscionable of me. I apologize."

How like Alicia—to use that word—"unconscionable"! He would have said "unpardonable". To hold out her hand, steady too, as if she had called to see him, to ask for a subscription to some charity. There she stood, with her head up, wearing mourning for Bendish. He laid his hand under hers; it rested there, motionless. They might have been taking a polite farewell of each other.

"Wait a minute," he urged; "wait a minute. What will you do?"

"Stay in Innsbruck, I think, or some village near."

"Why not go to London, or Paris? They're—they're more advanced about these things in Paris, I believe. I'd—I'd—" he was stammering now, finding it difficult to speak the words clearly—"I'd let you have some money." Then, with a violent effort to recover himself, he added, "You see, otherwise it's going to jeopardize my divorce—or yours."

"It shan't do that," she said, "and—I shan't—go to Paris."

"You'll go through with it?"

She nodded. "Yes—yes, I shall go through with it."

"You're a fool!"

"Good-bye, Louis; forgive me for being so—intrusive."

"Wait," he said. "Wait. You can't rush me like this. You must give me time to think. It's difficult—impossible. I can't do it. Why should I? I'm poor, I tell you. Maybe I shall never make money again. My luck may have turned." He narrowed his eyes. She saw his whole body stiffen with the effort he was making to control himself.

Alicia said, "I'm too tired to listen to arguments, Louis."

"I know—I know. There are no arguments, except those which I have with myself. To let you go, if this leaks out, is to lose the chance of a divorce. If I take you back—well, at some future date, if we both want it, we can play the same silly game over again. Look here"—he laid his hands on her shoulders—"stay here for tonight. I'm going out. This place suffocates me. Verney—you know him—will look after you. I'll come back with my decision. Stay here; I'll tell him to come and talk to you. He won't ask questions—and anyway"—he grinned like a gargoyle—"he's prepared to fall in love with you as it is. A pleasant fellow; I commend him to you."

"But I don't think there is any decision to come to," she said. "It's all so obviously impossible, unwarrantable."

"For God's sake be quiet!" he snarled. "It's my affair. I want to think it out."

He walked back to the dining-room. As he entered Verney sprang to his feet, looking excited and expectant. Silly fool—hoping to nose out a romance!

Louis said, "Oh, Verney, you might go and talk to my wife, will you? She'll stay the night. Book a room, please. If I'm not back, see that she has something eatable for dinner. That pork at midday was horrible. I shan't be late."

II

Francis Verney stood where Louis left him, his rather pale blue eyes startled, his long, thin fingers plucking at the hem of his tweed jacket. "You might go and talk to my wife, will you?" Matter-of-fact enough, the statement that the lovely Englishwoman was his wife, and now Silver had walked out and left him to talk to a woman who had presumably buried her lover that afternoon. He was both excited and disturbed. His whole outlook was romantic; the sight of Mrs. Silver—she was registered at the hotel in Innsbruck as "Mrs. Roger Bendish"—had fired him with interest. He had thought about her a great deal, imagined how wonderful it would be to paint her, tried to decide what combination of colours he would use, how they should be applied. Now she was here, and he was to "go and talk to her".

He made his way to the little salon, knocked and heard her tell him to enter. He took a deep breath—at least she wasn't crying. That made things easier; he couldn't bear to see a woman cry; it upset him, made him want to cry too.

He found her sitting in the hard, upright chair where Louis had left her.

"My name is Verney," he said. "Mr. Silver asked me to come and see if there was anything you wanted."

She said, "I'm desperately cold. Do you think that I could have some tea or hot coffee?"

"Of course. If you'll come into the dining-room, it's warmer there."

Kind and attentive, he fussed over her. Alicia watched his small, rather ineffective movements, noticed his sensitive face and the weak chin. She wondered vaguely how Verney and Louis came to be together, what bond existed between them.

"You've known my husband a long time?" The question came mechanically; she didn't really care what he answered. The last hour had been like a fragment of a dream. She scarcely remembered how she had left Innsbruck; only a dim impression remained of her father and old Bendish trying to persuade her to return to England with them. They had argued, repeated themselves again and again, and she had been too tired to listen. She only knew that she was not going to return to England, knew that she must go to Louis, and stake everything on this, her last chance. Roger was dead; that seemed the most incredible thing of all. They had left him in the ground—it had been so hard, the clods of earth had felt like metal when you touched them with your foot. The clergyman, elderly and stout, had worn a red-and-black hood over his surplice. It was an ugly shade of red. His surplice had hung limp and a little creased on his tall figure. He had read a great deal about things which were corruptible and incorruptible; closely reasoned, difficult statements.

Then, when her father and Bendish had gone, she hired a car and drove to Louis. How ridiculous it seemed now! Of course Louis couldn't take her back; men didn't do things like that; one couldn't expect it. The scene in the little salon had been so ugly. Louis staring at her, swearing, laughing and neighing like a horse, a dreadful sound. She had felt ashamed, beaten—she ought not to have come at all. Now, she had no right to wait until

Louis came back ; it only laid herself open to more scenes, forced her to listen to harsh things being spoken in a cold, hard voice. What on earth was she doing, sitting in this village inn, in this room hung round with stags' heads of various size—some of them minute ? What a pity to kill such small animals ! They must have looked very attractive when they were alive. . . . How the fair young man chattered !

" . . . and he said, why didn't I come with him. I've been with him about six weeks or two months. I'm bad at remembering exact dates. . . ."

"Really," Alicia heard herself say, and wondered what it was expected to mean.

"Yes . . . you see, I'm fond of him. You won't mind if I say that he's not easy, but he's worth while, if you know what I mean. He's alive, and interested. He's—he's lacked beauty in his life somehow. He's learnt to distrust people . . . even himself, except perhaps in business. I don't know anything about him there, of course. He's very clever . . ."

"Very—" She wondered where Louis had gone.

"I'm to book a room for you," he said. "Do you like one that faces back or would you prefer the front ? The front are larger, but a little noisy. Perhaps the back would be better. They're nice and warm. That's a great thing here, of course. It's quiet, but there are some more people coming for Christmas, Mrs. Silver."

On and on ; she thought that he would never stop. If only he would be quiet and let her think ! What was there to think about ? Roger—she couldn't bear that ; better to force herself to listen to this chattering young man with the pale eyes.

The door swung open and Louis came in. He seemed to bring a rush of cold air with him, as if his clothes were saturated with it.

Verney leapt to his feet. "I was just going to arrange for Mrs. Silver's room."

Louis scowled. "Good God, haven't you done that yet? What the devil have you been doing?"

"I'll go at once, Mr. Silver."

Louis turned to Alicia. "Where are your things? Innsbruck? At the hotel or the station? The hotel? I'm going for them. I suppose—" he spoke without any trace of emotion—"I suppose you're registered there as Mrs. Beaufort, eh?"

"Yes—Louis, tell me——"

"There isn't anything to tell. I'm going to fetch your baggage. You'd better stay here. I hope that Verney won't bore you as much as he bores me." He glanced round the room as if to assure himself that they were alone. "Don't imagine that there is anything sentimental in this. I don't even want to—make love to you. I can't afford to pay two hundred and fifty now for the privilege, even if I wanted to."

Alicia stood up. Their faces were level; her eyes were as cold as his.

"I'm going back to Innsbruck. I am sorry that I ever came here——"

"So am I," he returned, "and shall probably be even more sorry in the future. But—at the moment—it seems the wisest course to adopt. We need not see much of each other. I may go back to England for a time; not to make matters easier for you—but I ought to be back at work. I suppose that you don't know how many pieces of baggage you have? I thought not," as she shook her head. "Well, I can manage, I don't doubt. I shall dine there. Verney will look after you. Good night."

"Good night—and . . ." She hesitated.

"Hell! Don't try to thank me!" he snarled suddenly, his whole face twisted with anger. "I tell you that I'm doing this because I want to, because it suits me. Ms, do you understand? I don't want thanks, or love, or duty or companionship. At the moment my damned name is worth so little that I don't mind giving it to——"

"Don't say any more," Alicia said. "I understand perfectly."

He stared at her, his eyes narrowed to slits, then said abruptly, "I beg your pardon," and left her.

When Verney returned he fancied that she had been crying, but when she spoke to him her voice was even and steady. He thought that he must have been deceived. He began to tell her about her room, talking quickly to hide his excitement that she was staying, that he might see her every day, perhaps be of use to her.

"It's quite a nice room. I made them put in an easy chair—not that any of them are really easy. You'll see the sunrise over the mountains, and the snow, and the ski-ing slopes. Oh—" His dismay was apparent, he realized too late that she wouldn't want to see ski-ing slopes. "I mean would you—"

No," she said. "No, thank you; I'm sure it will be perfect. Could you ask them to send me up something to eat to my room? Nothing very much—I'm rather tired."

He was all eagerness, suggesting soup, fish—". . . if they have fish; they don't always, but I could find out".

She only said, "Whatever they have—not much of anything. Good night."

He waited for Silver to return. Dinner was scarcely over when the car drove up, and he heard Louis' voice calling for the porter to carry in the luggage. Verney ran out, to find Louis swaying a little as he watched the bags being taken out of the car. His eyes were bright, and his voice a little thick.

"Have you dined, Mr. Silver?"

"Dined? Yes. Off four double cognacs and coffee. Very good too."

"Mrs. Silver has gone to her room."

"Well, what about it? It's not my room."

"I thought—"

"That's your trouble, you think too damn' much."

In the dining-room, Silver sat before the stove, his legs

outstretched, his jaws clenched so tightly that the bone showed light against the skin. Once he said, "Ring—let's have something to drink. I'm frozen"; and when the cognac came, gulped it down as if he were thirsty.

"You look to me," Verney ventured to say, "as if you'd caught a chill. I think you've got a temperature, Mr. Silver."

"Do you? Thinking again, eh? Look here, you might as well know what's happened. My wife and I had a difference of opinion. She was divorcing me. She was at Innsbruck with Bendish and his father—family friends. Then this afternoon we decided to patch things up. It's a matter of convenience, not affection. *Convenience!* Make yourself as pleasant as you like to her; take her walking—I shan't mind. Only remember what I've told you. Keep it quite clear in your mind. Oh—and the divorce is off for the moment. She's"—he smiled—"decided to overlook my lapse from strict fidelity in a most generous way. That's all."

"I'm very proud that you should give me your confidence," Verney said. "I shall respect it, I swear that."

Louis looked at him curiously. What a fool the man was! And yet there was a quality about him which was almost lovable. He had a queer sort of sincerity and honesty.

"Don't respect it too much," Louis said. "No reason why people shouldn't know. It's impossible to hide a light—I refer to my wife's generous behaviour—under a bushel."

"I see that"—eagerly. "I suppose that—infidelity does mean a great deal to a woman—a good woman."

"I couldn't say. Ask my wife when you know her better. I'm going to bed."

He got Alicia's number from the little office, mounted the stairs, conscious that his chest hurt, and that he was alternately hot and cold. It must be due to that damned

drive to Innsbruck, after sitting in the hot and stuffy little salon. Or was it? He'd felt off colour for days, and this cursed upset hadn't made him feel any better! Now he'd saddled himself with Alicia until she chose to go off again with some other fellow as she had done with Bendish. She'd got dignity; he'd say that for her. That "Don't say any more. I understand perfectly" had made him feel a swine. It had lowered his self-esteem. No one liked to have their self-esteem lowered. She'd got courage too. It must have taken some courage to come to him and ask him to take her back. Not only her, either. What on earth was he to do with a child? Not even his own! The whole thing was fantastic in its idiocy. He must have gone crazy to have promised such a thing. It was incredible. If he hadn't felt so damned ill he'd have refused point blank. As it was—oh, damn, what did it matter?

Her room was number fourteen, right down the corridor. A devil of a long way when you felt tired as he did. Should he go in and see her? He'd got a right to. The people in the hotel might think it queer if he didn't. If they were going to play this silly game they might as well play it properly. The door was half open. A maid was unpacking. How like Alicia to find someone to wait on her, even in a village in Austria! The idea amused him. He knocked and entered.

Alicia, seated in an easy chair, looked up and said, "Oh, Louis——" They might have been back at Carrick, he thought.

"I see you've found someone to wait on you," he said.

"I was so tired. She offered to do it." And she said something in German to the smiling servant, who smiled still more and loosed a torrent of "*Ja, gütige Frau*", and ended by pointing to Alicia, then beaming at Louis, and crying, "*Schön—schön!*"

He said, "If I knew what she meant I might agree. What is it? Does she mean that you look tired?"

"Not quite." For the first time a smile flickered round her mouth. "She suggests that I am quite pleasant."

"I see." Then abruptly, "Have you everything you want?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Then—good night again."

"Good night, Louis. One moment." She spoke some rapid words to the maid, who curtsied and went out. Louis waited for her to continue. "I must say this," she began, "even if you dislike it. I say it for my own peace of mind. I am grateful. You need not be afraid; I shan't—give you any cause for anxiety. I have sufficient money to pay my own bills. I only want to live here quietly, and—later—we can decide where I shall go. You have been—very generous. I do thank you sincerely. I have been wondering, while I sat here, if any man in the whole world would have done so much for—any woman who had behaved as I have done."

"And what conclusion did you come to?" he asked. "Don't whitewash me, for God's sake. I explained why I've done this—accept that explanation and don't try to idealize me, or let sentiment enter into it. Tell Verney to get anything you need at any time. He's in a state of spiritual exaltation about you. Most boring to watch."

"Very well." But he knew that he had hurt her, got under that damned armour which all these people wore. It hadn't been easy for her to try to thank him, and he'd flung her gratitude back in her face. He'd met Verney as he walked back to his own room.

"Here," Louis said, "what does 'schön' mean in this godforsaken language?"

"Beautiful," Verney said. "Beautiful. Did you hear them singing that song in the bar—'Tirerland, du bist so schön'?"

"Yes, I wondered what the devil it meant."

CHAPTER NINE

I

VERNEY WAS PACING RESTLESSLY UP AND DOWN THE dining-room when Alicia entered it the following morning. She had slept badly, was conscious that her eyes were heavy, that her head felt leaden. When he saw her he came forward, his light eyes anxious, the little puckering which Louis disliked showing between his eyebrows.

"Mrs. Silver," he said nervously, "I'm afraid your husband's ill."

"Your husband". How queer it sounded! She had been accustomed, for the past months, to think of Roger as her husband. All night she had tried to realize what had happened yesterday; had tried to forget what Louis had said after her poor attempt to thank him. She had seen the sun come up over the snows. Her mind had gone back to other mornings when the coming of the day had meant new happiness, laughter and gaiety with Roger, and, crying, she had fallen asleep. Waking, when the servant came in to know if she might bring the morning coffee, Alicia had repeated to herself, 'I mustn't think. I must accept and—make the best of it all. Louis has a right to treat me as he wishes; he has a right to be bitter. I must hold fast to the thought that he has been generous—generous beyond belief. That's my anchor.'

She said, "Ill? How? I mean—tell me."

"I heard him moving about, and went in to see if anything was wrong. I thought last night that he had a temperature. He was sitting in a chair, wearing his dressing-gown. It's a very thick one he bought in Innsbruck because his silk one was too thin. He looked queer

—you know, feverish and complained of a pain in his chest ; kept holding his hands on it, pressing them down when he coughed. I asked if he'd see the doctor, but he only said, 'What on earth for ? I couldn't understand the man if he came.' All the same, I do think that he ought to see someone. It's not as if he was what you could call—robust, is he ? I mean he's wiry, but he isn't——"

She interrupted him. "Yes, I think he ought to see someone. Can you send for a doctor? You speak German, and mine is quite enough to understand anything reasonably simple."

Verney's face cleared. "Oh, I am so glad you've backed me up. You see, I've no real authority. You have. It makes such a difference. With the best will in the world——"

"Go and send for the doctor, Mr. Verney. He may not have started on his round yet."

The doctor came—a great, fair giant of a man, looking more like a Tyrolean farmer than a physician, and nodded his comprehension when Verney talked to him. He spoke very little, contenting himself with nods and low, expressive grunts. Surprisingly enough, it appeared that he spoke a little English, but when put to the test it was found to be so distorted as to be incomprehensible.

"Will you come up with him," Verney asked, "or shall I?"

She hesitated. "You—I think. I will come up if Louis wants me."

Silver was furious. He propped himself up in bed, cursed Verney, and asked how any of them dared to meddle with his affairs. His anger and torrent of abuse brought on a fit of coughing. When he dropped back on his pillows, panting, his eyes bloodshot, the doctor stepped forward and, unperturbed, began to make his examination. From time to time he flung instructions to Verney, who translated them.

"He says please breathe deeply."

Louis panted, "How the devil can I? Feels as if someone were sticking knives into me! Oh, hell!"

Later, "He says will you open your mouth?"

Finally the big doctor straightened himself, laying the palms of his broad hands in the small of his back, and stood surveying his patient. He spoke slowly and deliberately to Verney, while Louis lay fuming and angry because he could not understand a word of what was said. He wanted to say that he was only feverish, to explain that this was merely a chill, and if he might have a great deal of lemon-water he would be all right next day. He kept saying to Verney, "Look here—tell him—" but each time the doctor held up his huge hand and said, "Minoot—pleze—I spik."

At last he turned to Louis, held out his hand and heavily and courteously bade him good morning, then with ceremony, a stiff little bow and something approaching a smile, walked out.

Louis said, "And now—what?"

"He'll come back tonight. He will send in a nurse who speaks English."

"If she speaks it as well as that damned fool we shall be able to chat very pleasantly!"

"You must keep warm, not get out of bed—"

"Hell to that!"

"Light food—no pork, beef, potato, salad, sauerkraut—"

"Oh, get on, Verney—never mind the menu, what's wrong with me?"

For the first time Verney hesitated. "It's—it's not serious—except that all illness is serious, of course. I mean it may be all right in a day or two—it's pneumonia."

Louis Silver, his face twisted into a sudden grin, said, "That's pretty. Nice get-out for everyone if it did turn out to be—serious." As Verney was going out he said sharply, "Mind you, I want to be left alone. I don't want—anyone hanging around me—being dutiful!"

As the morning passed he knew that he felt worse ; his chest hurt unbearably ; his dragging cough worried him, leaving him shaking and weak. His skin was dry and very hot. At eleven o'clock the nurse came. A nun ! He'd never spoken to a nun in his life ; always regarded them as idiots who escaped from life, to live in seclusion, worshipping a host of imaginary saints and an equally improbable God. He stared at her with something like dismay. She was short, round, with bright, cheerful eyes, almost pretty, and quite young. As she walked he could hear the beads which hung at her waist clicking and rattling.

"Goot morning, Meia Herr. Ach, poor man, you are s-o-o 'ot."

Then she could speak English, or what passed for it ! He grunted his assent, licked his lips and asked for a drink.

She gave it to him, then set to work to tidy his room. How he loathed anyone touching his things, hanging up his trousers, laying away his shirt and underclothes in a drawer ! Evidently they expected him to stay in bed some time, confound them ! She was quiet and precise in her movements ; despite all his irritation, he had to admit that. Someone came to the door, passed in a large, long parcel, packets, and two hot-water bottles. . The nun beamed at him as she passed the foot of his bed, and said cheerfully :

"Now ! Ver-ry soon allus goot."

She busied herself at a table near the window. A maid came and lit a fire in the chilly-looking grate. Both women talked in undertones. Later the nun brought an armful of cotton-wool, hot and steamy, and laid it next to his skin under his pyjama jacket.

He said, "God, I'm hot enough already !"

"Not zee r-r-right hotness," she said, and smiled blandly.

He slept, woke to refuse some broth, was persuaded to take a little and dozed again, waking to look round the

room, which seemed unfamiliar. He closed his eyes, wondered if he were still at the "Gentian", and decided to ask no questions. More cotton-wool, more steamy heat. He coughed, and cursed under his breath.

He thought, 'I want a drink. Cognac would put me right,' and said to the nun, "I say—I'd like a cognac, please."

She shook her head, "Not—cognac—I cann-ot giff ziss cognac."

Where the devil was Verney? He had not been near for hours; was probably sitting in that hot dining-room making sheep's eyes at Alicia. Alicia hadn't been near him either. The pair of them didn't give a damn—well, after all, there was no reason why Alicia should care. But it would be pleasant to see her. Yet, would it be so pleasant? He wasn't certain. Funny business it all was—Bendish, Alicia, Louis Silver and—this baby. He felt a queer curiosity about the child, found himself wondering of which sex it would be. There was no particular resentment; why should he be resentful? They'd parted; he had known that Bendish wasn't a man to find a spiritual love particularly satisfactory. There was nothing to resent; you couldn't expect men like Bendish to develop new qualities just because they fell in love. Leopards can't change—was it leopards? Just as right if you said, "Tigers can't change their stripes."

The door opened; he stirred and said, "Now who the devil's this?"

The nun hurried forward, held the door open and beamed back at Louis.

"The Herr Doktor—"

Louis heard the doctor's gruff voice as he entered, and saw Alicia behind him.

She came over to the bed, asking, "How are you, Louis?"

"You've remembered that I am alive, have you he?" asked.

She didn't answer, but moved away and allowed the doctor to come to the bedside. His hands were cold, and Louis felt a sudden hatred towards all people who had cold hands. Cool hands—they were pleasant, but cold ones! They were all talking together, something about the '*Nacht*'. Night—that was it—the night. He strained his ears to catch what they said. "Herr Verney—Frau Silver"—he didn't want anyone to sit up all night.

"Look here," he said, "Verney 'ul drive me crazy with his chatter."

Alicia turned, speaking quietly. "He won't chatter—and I shall be here most of the time. Don't worry, Louis."

II

He opened his eyes; the light was shaded, the flames from the fire shot up now and again, making fantastic shadows on the light washed walls. It was night; he'd been asleep. Someone was moving softly about. Louis said, "That you, Verney?"

"No, it's I—Alicia."

"I want a drink——"

She brought it, held the glass for him. She wasn't very good at holding glasses, he thought; some of the liquid trickled down his chin, and she wiped it away with a handkerchief smelling of perfume. It was a scent he recognized . . . French, sold in little stumpy black bottles, very expensive, with a fantastic name. "Nuit de Something-or-other".

"Still extravagant, eh?" he said. "That scent——" then felt sorry, because she'd been very decent sitting up with him, bringing him a drink, and her hands were soft and very cool. Not cold, only cool. "Your hands are nice and cool," he said. "That damned doctor's are as cold as—death."

She went back to her table, then she and Verney

propped him up and slipped more cotton-wool round him. He heard himself saying "Ugh, Ugh" once or twice, and added, half in apology, "It's my blasted chest—Ugh!" He thought, 'They're being very kind, doing their best, but they aren't as slick about it as that fat little nun. Well, after all, it's not their job.'

Days went on. He lost count of them. Sometimes it was bright morning, and when he looked again it was night. He had distressing dreams, and the noise was terrible. He asked very often why the devil they couldn't stop the noise.

"How can any of you expect me to sleep? It's deafening."

The nun said, "Ven this chest he is beser, zen der noise eet veel entst, so!"

"Chest! What's the noise to do with my chest?"

"Dis noise iss der chest—sey arre von, Herr Silver."

He looked forward to the nights, when Alicia was there to give him drinks, to ease his pillow, and to replace the cotton-wool jackets. He liked the light on her hair; it was like gold in a dark place. It was difficult to know what was reality and what were dreams. . . . He had been asked to find Bendish. . . . He asked Alicia to give him his clothes. She stood by the bed looking down at him, and shook her head.

"You don't really want them. I don't know where they are, Louis. They've been put away somewhere. Try to sleep."

He knew then that she'd given them away, narrowed his eyes and said so.

"How dare you give away my clothes? I know—oh, I know."

She bent lower. "No, they've been *put away*, not given away."

"That's a damned lie. You've given them to Bendish."

He sulked because of those clothes! Nursing his grievance through the night; it permeated all his dreams.

Bendish wearing his clothes, damn him! Not content with taking his wife, he must come eadging for his clothes. Let Bendish wear his own grave-clothes. What the devil were grave-clothes, anyway? Long white things, like sheets; ghosts wore them in pictures. The Christmas Carol, Marley's ghost, the ghost of Christmas Past, the ghost of—oh, damn the ghosts! He knew that he was sinking lower and lower in the bed every day—every week, month, year—he didn't know how long he had been ill. Days and days and days and days. He must get better, work again, make money. Alicia couldn't have much, and this baby—what on earth made him take it on? Or was it his child? No, no, it wasn't his. It was the one that he had wanted, and Bendish had taken it from him. That was why he'd killed Bendish. Killed him in the street at Innsbruck—or was it Vienna?

He called Alicia. "Look here—I must get up—must work—I've not much money."

"I have plenty—that's all right."

"Not for this baby. Milk's expensive; the cows have to come right down from the mountains—that's why they ring bells. I want to learn German. Bad business not speaking languages. Only know one word—'schön', 'schön'. You lied about that—what d'you want to lie for? Silly. I always find out." He coughed and cursed; she held a cup to his lips. Her hand shook; he said, "Damned inefficient, aren't you?"

"I'm sorry—"

"A'right, a'right. Better'n that little fat black crow. Gets on my nerves. So does Verney. 'S'Verney in love with you? 'Musing if you went off with Verney."

He slept, and woke feeling different. There was less noise; plenty still, but it was diminishing. He was dreadfully tired, too tired to move his arms or legs. He opened his eyes, looking for Alicia, but she wasn't there. Instead, the nun came patterning over, crooning and smiling, talking about praising God, and giving thanks, and

gladness and a good deal more. She brought a drink, sponged his hands and face—she never dried them properly, always left damp patches. He felt that a mist had cleared. He knew that he had been ill, that he had worried about his clothes, and money. That was finished. He was Louis Silver, the Mystery Man; he'd get strong and make as much money as he wanted. No one should or could keep him down. "You can't keep a squirrel on the ground." That was like him! God! How badly he ached!

Sleeping again, he woke to find Alicia sitting near the fire. He could see her quite plainly. She had ceased appearing and disappearing into a fog. He said, "Alicia—"

She started. She had been thinking—what of? He felt that queer little spurt of jealousy. Not of him—adding mentally, 'And why should she?'

"Yes, Louis. You're better—you've slept beautifully, quietly."

"Did you all imagine that I was going to die?"

"You were very ill—"

"And I've disappointed you?" Then, seeing her face, he added quickly, "Were you really worried about me?"

"We all were—" Ah, she'd put up the barrier that time!

"You've been very kind; I'm very grateful. You must have lost a lot of sleep, you and Verney."

"Francis has been so good. Nothing was a trouble. He really is devoted to you." She was enthusiastic about Verney. Using his Christian name! They must have made great strides. How Alicia could find him amusing, how she could wish to be on sufficiently intimate terms to call him "Francis", Louis didn't know.

"Or to you?" Louis said. "If you call him 'Francis', does he call you 'Alicia'?"

"He calls me—Mrs. Silver."

"Admirable restraint. Well, your job's over—no more night-nursing, eh?"

"I don't know . . ." Her voice trailed off, and he fell asleep.

Recovery was a slow and tedious business. Louis Silver was a bad patient, nervous and irritable, refusing to ask for whatever he needed, and resentful because people did not know automatically when he wanted drinks, or his pillows shaken, or his bed remade. He snarled at Verney, snapped at Alicia, and scarcely spoke to the cheerful little sister.

There were days when Alicia went down to the dining-room, where Verney sat trying to find unlikely stations on the wireless, feeling that she would never enter Louis' room again. She was not a patient woman. She had been spoiled and petted, been given admiration and adulation, and found it difficult to tolerate calmly Louis' sneers and fault-finding. She had been feeling ill, apprehensive and dispirited; she had conquered her own disabilities, had nursed him and never considered herself in the least. She had hoped that after the change came, when the danger was over, she might have found some softness, some hint of tenderness. Instead he had seemed to have grown harder, less able to restrain that bitter tongue of his.

She was not in love with him; she did not even—she told herself—love him. She had flung herself on his mercy because she was afraid and lonely, and he had seemed the one person in the world who could save her. She had felt gratitude, and had wondered if some day, perhaps, they might not find at least a friendship and companionship. She had tried, and each time Louis had repulsed her, wounded her. What made it all the more difficult to bear was the knowledge that he inflicted pain quite consciously. His words were chosen deliberately, selected with care; his sneers were calculated. There was nothing impulsive in his remarks to her.

Verney, turning from the wireless, said, "Oh, Mrs.

Silver—come and sit down. You look tired—you are tired. Shall I get you—make you—some tea? My mother sent me a quarter of Lyons' tea. I've a spirit-lamp in my room. I love a good cup of tea, don't you? I suppose that most English folk do. Did I tell you that I've got a commission to paint a series—Austrian Tirol in winter? Nice, isn't it? Bright peasant costumes. You know, every valley has its own proper costume. Some of them are really most—"

She said, "Francis—what about that tea? I'm longing for some."

"I am sorry." He was always penitent. "I do ramble on, don't I?"

"Indeed you do," she smiled. "I shall never cure you of it."

He hurried off to make the tea. Alicia still smiled.

'What a kind little man he is, in spite of his babble! I wonder why one thinks of him as little? He must be three inches taller than Louis, and no one ever thinks of Louis as little. I don't believe that he is, in anything. He's too definite, too actual. Are Jews always difficult to understand, I wonder? Her thoughts ran on; she was too tired to check them. She always left Louis' bedroom with the feeling that she had been drained of every scrap of energy. Did the little sister think and feel that too? Perhaps, as a religious, she had some special store of energy. Curiously, the sister liked Louis Silver, laughed about his snarling, even spoke of his swearing with a sort of tolerance.

"Poor man, so angry because he is ill. Always he these wicked words uses. It is phenomenal! They nothing at all mean to him. Just words, and ugly ones! He has not knowledge to know how ugly they are, I think."

Verney came back, proudly bearing his tea-tray. He set it down and began to pour out. His movements, when he did small, finicky things like pouring out tea, were particularly neat; only when he attempted to do things

needing strength or force were his hands so singularly ineffective.

"There," he said, "that will do you good."

Alicia, soothed by the warmth of the big stove, said lazily, "How very neatly you do things like pouring tea, Francis! That's why when it came to giving Louis medicines and putting on fresh jackets you were worth four of me. I was so bad—and I knew it."

"Oh, I don't know—"

"Louis, even when he was desperately ill, got so irritated. He hates people who fumble, who aren't certain."

"You see—" Verney leaned forward and spoke eagerly. "You see, Mrs. Silver, he himself never fumbles, either mentally or physically. He is always certain. You can't help admiring him, can you?"

"I suppose," she said, reverting to her former thoughts, "it's the Jew in him that makes him so difficult, makes him hard and bitter and—revengeful. Don't you think?"

"I don't know—are those attributes particularly Jewish?"

"Aren't they?"

"I think—" His voice was very gentle; he spoke softly. "I think they are attributes which other nations have donated to the Jews, to account for and excuse their own shortcomings. As a reason for persecution we are told that the Jews plot, mix themselves in intrigue, extract usurious money. Don't other men do the same?"

"I never thought about it—"

"Men have always persecuted the Jews. I once heard a Jew say, 'We are the Chosen Race—chosen to suffer.' Always men have had to find excuses for what they did; they have labelled the Jew with all those things which they knew would make him less acceptable to the community. How often has the Jew disproved them? How often has he shown himself to be all that a man could wish? Oh, not all—and, where one here and

there has fallen very low, his fault, sin, crime—what you will—has been shouted from the housetops ; men's voices shouting to the ends of the earth—"Here you are ! A typical Jew. Our case is proved ! "

Alicia stared at him. "I never heard you talk like this before, Francis."

He laughed. "You have never before heard me talk about anything on which I felt strongly. I have never known many Jews, but I have formed those opinions on what I observed and on what I know. The finest code of morals ever given to us were given by a man who lived up to them all His life. He was a Jew—Jesus Christ."

"Oh." The words startled her ; she disliked to hear anyone speak of religious matters ; it made her slightly uncomfortable. "Surely He was the—great exception ?"

"He never said so. And his friends—were they exceptions too ? James, John, Peter, Andrew, Saint Joseph, and the Virgin—all Jews."

"It never struck me to think of them as Jews," she said.

"But you'd never think of Iscariot as anything else," Francis replied quickly. "If Mr. Silver is a Jew, then he may have all the faults of Jews—and other men—but he may have some of the virtues which belong—almost exclusively—to the Jews." He broke off, his face suddenly flushed, and said, "It will soon be Christmas. I'm child enough to love it. They will have a Christmas-tree here ; everyone has a tree——"

Alicia bent forward and laid her hand on his. "Why did you switch from one subject to another like that, Francis ?"

"I don't know—I thought we'd finished that bit of discussion."

"You didn't," she insisted. "You felt that you were skating on thin ice for some reason. Something about Louis and—me ; what was it ? I want to know."

"No, no—please," Verney protested. "I mean—it's finished. I said——"

"Too much to stop now," Alicia said. "Francis, how much do you know of Louis and I?"

His face showed his distress. She fancied that there were tears in his eyes. His hands moved nervously, moving the tea-cups, pushing the bits of china this way and that. He made a violent effort to control himself.

"I know—he told me that you had decided—very generously—to forgive his infidelity. That you had been going to divorce him."

"Yes—and the rest?"

"I said that I was honoured by his confidence and that I should respect it. He told me that I need not respect it too strictly, that he wanted people to know. He added that you couldn't hide a light under a bushel; he told me that he referred to your generous forgiveness."

"Louis said that?" she said softly; then, "But how did he say it? How does he say things? Bitterly, making game of the rather noble sentiments that he voices! He had his own reasons for saying that, and you know it, Francis."

"Indeed I do," he said gently. "Yes, I do, Mrs. Silver. I have been with him for months—"

"And where were you leading me with all that chatter about Jews, and saints, and—the rest?" Her head was up, her eyes colder than he had seen them for weeks. Even the tone of her voice chilled him. He was not a brave young man; he was acutely sensitive, and fully conscious of all his short-comings. Life had never been easy for him. He lacked self-confidence, and his artistic appreciation was too sound to prevent him from realizing that his own work would never be anything but mediocre. In Louis Silver he had found a man who possessed all the attributes which he lacked; a man who might anger, taunt him, snarl, but who was strong, filled with courage and vitality. More, he was a man who, Francis Verney felt, possessed a longing to understand those things which life offered, but which by reason of his success, his devotion to the task

of growing rich, had escaped him. Again and again he had been startled by some chance remark of Silver's, some question which had nothing to do with material things, but which hinted that he was actually dissatisfied, fully conscious that he was losing so much that might add to the beauty of his existence. Now, facing this beautiful woman, for whom he had unbounded admiration, whom he had come to know so well during the past few weeks, he felt that he was called upon to defend Silver, and brought all his courage and determination to bear on the task.

"I wasn't consciously leading you anywhere, Mrs. Silver. I began, and then saw where I was going. That's where I—side-tracked. I couldn't face the end of my—my—defence."

"Defence of . . .?"

"Your husband, whether he's a Jew or not. Because"—he averted his eyes; she saw him set his teeth for a moment—"he's—a just man. Because he refused to take the opportunity that offered. I can't quote it quite correctly, I'm afraid—it's a long time since I studied these things, only bits stick. Somewhere it—says——"

"It?" Alicia said, coldly impatient. "What is—It?"

"I'm afraid it's the Bible. Somewhere the Bible says: 'Because of the hardness of your hearts . . . Moses permitted that writs of divorcement should be given.' And—again: 'Her husband, being a just man, was not willing . . . I know that it's different . . .' He was stumbling badly now, running his fingers through his fair hair, growing less and less able to order his thoughts. 'But it's only that—phrase: ' . . . being a just man'. It was something that couldn't have been avoided; he knew that—or we think that he did. Mr. Silver isn't a man with hardness of heart, he's a—just man. That's all, Mrs. Silver."

"I see. I think that next time I want you to sermonize, Francis, you can rely on my telling you. Remember

this, that whatever Louis does, has done, or might do in the future, he will do it because it pleases *him*, satisfies *him*, fulfils some plan of *his*. No one else ever counts, ever will count, with him." She rose, and stood watching him, her face immovable. "I have some letters to write. I think that I shall dine in my room; I'm tired."

"Very well, Mrs. Silver, I'll tell them. But—but—you're wrong. He may think as you do, but then you're both wrong. He may not—not *know*; he may believe that he is everything you say. . . . He's not, not really."

"He's fortunate in having such a whole-hearted defender. Good night."

"Good night, Mrs. Silver. Won't you want me to help you with Mr. Silver tonight?"

"I think that there won't be room for us both. . . ."

CHAPTER TEN

I

ALICIA TOLD HERSELF THAT SHE WAS VERY ANGRY, furious, with Francis Verney. That he should have dared to explain Louis to her, and dared to use similes ! Because he chose to accept Louis at his own valuation, that did not give him the right to try to impose his beliefs on her ! And to have used preposterous Biblical examples ! The whole thing was a piece of gross impertinence. Her face flaming with annoyance, she made her way to her room along the long corridor, with its coarse matting, and narrow tables bearing cases of stuffed birds and beasts.

Louis' door was ajar, and, as she passed, he called in a voice unfamiliar by reason of its weakness : "I say—is that you, Verney ?"

She paused ; she was in no mood to talk to Louis, but her sense of duty made her answer, "No—it's Alicia."

"Come in a minute," he said ; and, as she entered, continued in that tone of acute irritation which seemed to have become habitual to him, "That wretched woman's gone off to drink coffee or something. The cat's outside on the window-sill—it's crying to come in. Let it in, will you ?"

"Ought you to have the cat in here ?" Her voice sounded vague ; she knew nothing about cats, cared little for them. Then the idea that Louis felt concern for the creature surprised her. "I didn't know that you liked cats."

"One of the many things you don't know about me," he returned. "Let it in."

The little black-and-white cat squeezed in as she opened the window, its tail held stiffly erect, its whole body oozing satisfaction at being allowed to leave the cold behind and enter the warm room. It sprang on Louis' bed and began to "make bread" among the blankets as if its life depended on it.

Louis extended a thin hand and began to rub its ears ; the sound of its purring reached Alicia. He looked up, met her eyes and smiled, the first friendly smile, she reflected, she had seen on his face since they had met again.

"It likes that," he said. "I've got what they call—a way with cats."

She nodded, thinking how thin his wrist looked. "When are they going to let you get up?"

"I was up for ten minutes this afternoon. God, how angry I was ! My legs felt like soaked blotting-paper, jelly, or something equally revolting. I wanted to cry or scream with rage. I did neither. I merely snarled at the sister. The more I snarl, the more she smiles."

Impulsively Alicia said, "I've been furious this afternoon too. With Francis Verney."

Louis' eyebrows shot up. "With Verney ! I thought that you were on such excellent terms !"

"He took upon himself to give me—in his estimation, at least—a sketch of your character. I'm afraid that I resented it."

"Ah ! I take it that the admirable young man spoke sufficiently well of me. Kind of him—but, of course, distressing for you. I can imagine that you might force yourself to speak with restraint about me, providing no one else agreed with you. Still, I shouldn't quarrel with Verney. He might be useful ; he tells me that he'll be staying some time. And—as soon as I am better, on my feet again, I'm going back to England."

Startled, she cried, "To leave me here—alone ?"

"My dear, why not ? You surely don't want me here.

I must get back to work some time, and—well, does the situation demand—an official husband?"

She stared at him, her hands resting heavily on the wooden rail at the end of the bed; then slowly her eyes filled with tears, and he saw that her lips trembled. He uttered a quick exclamation of annoyance.

"Can't you see," she cried, stung into replying to his protest—"can't you see how terrible it all is—for me? Oh, I know that you've been unbelievably generous, but—I'm so alone. I haven't a soul to talk to—I'm frightened! I don't want to be—taken back. You and I have never loved one another—we both understand that from the first—but couldn't you be a little tolerant, couldn't you forget to sneer at everything?"

"I'm afraid that you credit me with greater kindness than I possess," Louis said, his fingers still caressing the little cat. "I can't see myself growing solicitous about this child—who isn't mine. In fact, if I attempted to be, wouldn't the situation be slightly—indelicate?"

Alicia dried her eyes. She had mastered her emotion; her face was expressionless. That was the last time she would ever lay herself open to that kind of torture. Never again would she make it possible for Louis Silver to taunt her. Whatever she had done, nothing could give him the right to humiliate her as he did.

"I think that it's all been a ghastly mistake," she said. "I ought never to have stayed. I must write to my father—explain—go back to him."

Louis' dark eyes flickered. He did not look at her. When he spoke he sounded like a stranger who gives dispassionate opinions.

"Difficult," he said—"very difficult. You've been here—what is it?—nearly a month, with me, registered as Mrs. Silver. The divorce—well, that's stopped; it would automatically be so in any case. I don't imagine that even your friends—with all their tolerant disregard for conventional morality—will exactly welcome you

with open arms. They talk a lot about freedom, and all the rest of it, but it's only talk, not conviction. I—I—" His fumbling for words surprised her; she looked up to find that he was still intent on stroking the little cat—

I promise that I'll be quite decent—I mean this infant shan't suffer. When I take on anything I carry it through—I don't shirk things. You'd better stay, Alicia."

"Yes, I suppose so. I feel as if I am caught in a trap!"

He raised his eyes. She fancied that they smiled—a smile which did nothing to soften them.

"My dear—you walked into it, didn't you?"

Then the little nun came pattering back in her soft felt slippers, bearing hot soup in a cup, fussing gently and clicking her tongue in protest at the sight of the sleeping cat. She moved as if to pick it up, but Louis refused to let it go.

"Leave it," he said. "It appreciates me, considers me to be a really fine and kindly person. It's a novelty for me, and I enjoy it. Good night, Alicia. Oh, I don't think that I need anyone to sit up with me tonight."

II

He grew stronger, was able to walk about his room, and later to come down to the dining-room. Christmas drew near, and the house was filled with the cheerful bustle of preparations. Children rushed up and down the hilly street, dragging sleighs on which were placed loads of evergreens, and little firs destined to become Christmas-trees. Louis could see the sparkling toys, tinsel and coloured paper displayed in the shop-window opposite.

"You've made up your quarrel with Verney, then?" he said to Alicia, when they both returned from some shopping expedition in the village.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Yes—it didn't seem

worth while to keep it up. He was gloomy, and as he is the only person I have to talk to—to continue to be on bad terms seemed like cutting off my nose to spite my face."

"How wise of you, and how pleasant to have the whole place reeking of goodwill at this time of year!" Louis commented.

He was still painfully thin, unable to walk without the aid of his stick. As yet he had not been allowed to go out, and seemed to have no desire to do so. For hours he sat reading the two-days-old English papers which were sent to him, turning on the wireless and standing staring into the village street. Verney made pathetic attempts to interest him. He talked of his sketches, showed them to Louis with guarded eagerness, longing for praise. He stammered when he tried to tell Louis how glad he was to see him about again, and brought him bits of local gossip and news of the entertainments which were being planned to mark the season.

"Might I—that is, might we—Mrs. Silver and I—have the car to go into Innsbruck?" Verney asked one morning. "I learnt to drive—when you were ill and things were wanted. I could drive a little before, though I only know that if I do this—the car starts, and if I do that—it stops. You see, my brother George has a Baby Austin, and he used to let me take it down to the——"

Louis said, "Nice for the Baby Austin! Where do you want to go—Innsbruck? I shouldn't have thought that she wanted to go there much. What's the idea? Flowers on graves, eh?"

He watched Verney close his lips tightly. He was learning to control himself, yet he couldn't prevent his suddenly flushed face giving him away. Louis repeated, "Is that what she wants to do?"

"One of the things," Verney said. "It's—natural, isn't it?"

"So she's poured it all out to you, eh? How touching!

"No, Mr. Silver, she poured out nothing. She said that there were some English in the cemetery there, and that she——"

"Quite. What is it? 'Some corner of a foreign field that is for ever England . . .' I don't mind, take the car. It's going to be damned cold."

"That's awfully good of you," Verney said earnestly. "I mean that!"

"Do you? Then mind your own damn' business," Louis snapped suddenly.

Before they started Verney came in to ask if he wanted anything from the town; he was always ready to run errands or execute commissions for people.

"What d'you think I want? Christmas presents for everyone, or—to offer a contribution to the flowers for the graves? No, thanks, Verney. I have never had the Christmas spirit. I am the lineal descendant of Scrooge."

Verney shook his head, the lock of fair hair tumbled over his forehead.

"No, not really," he said. "I don't believe that."

"Well, I don't want anything—unless you see some English papers." The younger man turned to go. When he reached the door Louis said, "And, Verney—it's cold. Don't let Mrs. Silver hang about in that confounded cemetery. I don't want people snivelling and coughing round me——"

"I won't, Mr. Silver."

Alone in the dining-room, Louis sat, legs outstretched, hands deep in his trousers pockets. He was bored; he hated inactivity, longed to be back again at work, pitting his brains against those of other men—and winning every time. That set-back of his might not prove to have been a bad thing; it had taught him the weak places in his system. He had been like a kitten, rushing after anything and everything. This time he would limit

his activities, move more slowly, and expend less effort on organizing new ventures.

How much was there in this scheme of Hawkes', this printing and production of pictures? He frowned, began to speculate, to plan where such a business might be enlarged, without destroying the original idea. Side-lines, usage of waste material. Not a scrap of canvas, not a brushful of paint lost. That was where profits were made. No leakages anywhere. He realized that he had no intention of returning to his own town, no ideas of building up again on the ruins of the old structure. When he went back—if he ever did—he must return there able to take up his life at the point where he had given it up. He wasn't going back to Melbrough to be poor, to find men avoiding him in the street, and referring to him as "that poor devil Silver, who once rolled in money".

In addition, there would be—Alicia. He frowned, dug his hands still deeper into his pockets. Would there always be Alicia? She had left him once, found a man who attracted her, and taken the bit in her teeth. That was why they were both landed in this mess now! She was young, lovely; she made no attempt to hide her dislike of him—he rather admired her pluck; it would have been horrible if she had toadied to him to show her gratitude! Insupportable! That was one of her own special words. Queer how some words were characteristic of her. They were not particularly long words, but he could never imagine other people using them with the same effect. Insuperable! Insufferable! Incredible! Making them seem different from when other people said them. "My dea-ah Francis," she said, when he made some wild statement, "oh, how silly!" Individual, that was what she was. Clear-cut, definite, and—almost always—mistress of herself. Queer how that day in his bedroom she'd broken down and begun to cry. Perhaps she felt ill. How ill did women feel when

they were going to have a baby? A baby with Roger Bendish for its father. Alicia, her fingers blue with cold, was possibly kneeling beside his grave now, arranging flowers with wet stalks.

Louis frowned, got up and began to walk up and down the long narrow room. He felt disturbed, angry. If he'd died, would she have plastered his grave with flowers? Not likely! Anyway, what did it all matter? Christians believed that people went soaring up to heaven; heathen, atheists and the rest of 'em thought that you were so much dead mutton to be shoved in the ground out of the way. In either case, why go and scatter flowers?

Sentimentality! An excuse to have their heart-strings torn, to get red-eyed and look back with regret at what had happened months ago. Again he felt a spasm of anger against the dead Bendish. He'd smashed Alicia's marriage; not that it was much of a success, but it—it had served. He'd dragged her off to winter sports, contrived to get killed, landed her in this hole, and now—even when he was dead—she had to risk catching her death of cold hanging about his grave! Not much of a fellow, anyway, that sulky young Bendish.

He heard the car, and was conscious that he was glad they were home, even faintly excited at the thought of their coming in laden with parcels—Christmas parcels. Why the devil hadn't they asked him to go with them? He could have muffled up, taken precautions; he might even have bought some presents himself—for Verney, and the baby in the house—the one like a pink rose, for the tall girl in the bar-room, for the little chamber-maid who loved the cat, for the little sister. . . . He was growing quite excited at the thought of what he might have bought.

Only they hadn't asked him. They'd not wanted him, only his car!

'Don't be so damned childish,' he remonstrated with

himself. 'What on earth do you want cantering to Innsbruck ?'

He walked out to meet them, moving slowly, catching the sound of Verney's high, nervous laugh. Louis thought, 'He laughs like a Pansy. I sometimes wonder if he isn't one, a sort of unconscious Pansy !' He opened the hall door, and for the first time for weeks savoured the clean coldness of the air. They were getting out of the car. Alicia was handing parcels to Verney.

At the sound of the opening door she turned, saw Louis, and called, "Louis—go back ! How dare you come out into the cold !"

"I'm all right. Can I help you with those things ?"

She stamped her foot. "You can go in—*at once*!"

"Oh, very well—" Queer to have Alicia giving him orders. Not unpleasant. He shouted in at the office, "Let's have some tea quickly, please. Mrs. Silver's cold."

The waitress emerged, said, "*Bitte?*"—and Louis remembered that he had spoken in English, taking for granted that she would understand. He said, "Tea!"—held up three fingers, and then pointed to the clock, saying, "*Schnell, schnell!*"—one of the few German words he knew.

Verney and Alicia came in, their faces shining with the cold, their arms filled with packets, which they tumbled down on to the table in a heap. Louis, watching her closely, tried to see if there were marks of tears on her cheeks, if her eyes looked inflamed with crying, then suddenly felt ashamed that he should have subjected her to such a scrutiny. What business of his was it ? He was growing petty and altogether despicable.

He said, "Tea's coming. It'll be here in a minute."

"Did you order it ?" Alicia turned and smiled. "That's really kind, isn't it, Francis ? We're frozen. Innsbruck was filled with knife-edged winds waiting at every corner. Take my parcels upstairs, Francis, will

you? Put them in my room. No, of course they mustn't be opened. No parcels are opened until Christmas. Wait, I'll take them myself; I feel shiny and red with the cold. Give them to me."

Verney closed the door behind her, walked over to the stove, rubbing his hands. "Oh, it was cold, but great fun!"

Louis frowned. "Fun! I thought that you were going to attend to the grave of the dear departed?"

"Yes, we did go up there—to the cemetery. We didn't stay long—"

"Was—was Mrs. Silver—upset?" He could have bitten his tongue out for saying that; the second the words left his lips he regretted them.

Verney said very softly, "Upset—I don't know. She was very gentle, and—and *sorry*. Because he was quite young. It's always sorrowful when quite young people die. They've missed such a lot. I always think that—"

Louis said, "And afterwards?"

"We went shopping. And I wanted to take her to have coffee at Schindler's, but she wanted to get home, to have tea here."

"And now she's back she goes upstairs and will probably let the stuff get as cold as charity. Go and tell her to make haste, Verney."

III

Three days later Louis went to Innsbruck. He sneered at himself, explained his action to himself by repeating that it was impossible not to be dragged into this atmosphere of Christmas and present-giving. He announced his intention at luncheon, saying, "I'm going into Innsbruck this afternoon. Want anything, either of you?"

Alicia stared at him, "Going into Innsbruck! How?"

"The same way that you and Verney went," he said.
"In my car."

"You're driving yourself?"

"Why not? I'm all right again."

"Let Francis go with you," Alicia urged. "Take him, in case it's too much for you, please, Louis."

Again that sensation that it was rather pleasant to have her solicitous about his welfare. He smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "All right—I don't mind. Coming, Verney?"

Driving into the town, over the hard roads with the snow lying thick along the sides, Verney said, "Pity we didn't bring Mrs. Silver. There'd have been plenty of room, wouldn't there? I mean, it's pretty dull for her, always stuck in Steinach. Nothing to do except walk and read and sit in the stuffy dining-room."

"Has she been grumbling?"

"No, oh no!"—eagerly. "But one can't help noticing things. She's young, and used to having a good time. Garrick must have been a lovely place! She showed me some photographs one day, of the gardens and the house. Told me about the mare you gave her—she said she was the best in the county. And your little secretary, Barnard, who was so devoted to you; and your mother—she sounds so nice, your mother."

"You gathered that my mother sounded 'so nice' from what Alicia said?"

"Yes. Oh, she admitted that they didn't understand one another awfully well, but she always says that she has character, courage and devotion to you."

So they talked, often about Garrick, and the gardens, and—his mother. He knew that he wanted, at that moment, to talk about those things to someone, to talk of his plans for the future, his hopes and schemes. Alicia could talk to Verney—then why the deuce couldn't she talk to him sometimes? She must know that he was lonely—that she wasn't the only person who found a

small Austrian village a dull place in the middle of winter. Some of the clear brightness of the early-afternoon sunshine seemed to have gone; the landscape had lost its glitter; it looked cold and drab, unfriendly and foreign. Louis, his shoulders up, sat at the wheel, driving too fast, taking risks, simply because he was sulkily angry. He knew exactly how unreasonable he was being, realized that it was unfair to expect Alicia to make advances of friendliness when he had consistently repulsed her, but the sense of disappointment persisted.

At the "Tirolerhof" he got out, and Verney followed him into the lounge. Louis flung himself down in one of the big chairs, ordered coffee, and lit a cigarette. His face was overcast, his brows drawn together into a hard line.

Verney, with a desperate attempt to be cheerful, said, "Then when you've had your coffee we'll go and do your Christmas shopping, eh?"

"I'm too damned tired," Louis said. "I'll stay here. You go and do the shopping. Get something for Alicia; you know her tastes better than I do. Get something for the baby, and the servants—and for yourself."

"But—it won't be the same," Verney said. "I mean—Mrs. Silver would so much rather have something you chose."

"Don't you believe it! To a woman—a present's a present, whoever gets it for her. Do as you're told, Verney." He pulled out his pocket-book, counted out what seemed to Verney a large amount of money, turning over the notes with his thin fingers quickly and with precision. "There you are. Heaven knows I've no right to be spending capital like this. . . ." For a second a flicker of a smile touched his lips. "Confound you and your Christmas spirit!"

Verney finished his coffee, then stood up and said, almost wistfully:

"You're certain that you won't come too?"

"Quite certain."

The moment Verney had gone Louis regretted his refusal. What on earth possessed him to choose to sit here in an hotel which held nothing but memories of things he wished to forget? His first sight of Alicia, then seeing her stumbling along, leaning on the arm of old Bendish . . . watching the two old men—Bendish's father and her own—discussing matters with the manager, wagging their heads, whispering and nodding. What a horribly difficult situation it was ; made worse, intensified, by this Christmas business ! Last Christmas they'd been at Carrick ; there had been plenty of money, although even then he had begun to feel uneasy at the way things were going. Last Christmas he had given Alicia half a dozen presents—things from Cartier's, Asprey's, Lacloche. She had given him a dress watch unbelievably thin and fine, and a cocktail cabinet filled with elaborate glasses, and so contrived that half a dozen patent gadgets were included in it. Not one of the presents had meant anything to either of them ; they were given because it was the right thing to do, and on his part because it flattered his vanity to hear Alicia telling her friends what he had given her. This year—he wondered what Verney would get ? Something damned silly, probably. He ought to have gone himself, instead of sulking here.

Sulking ! Nice admission for a grown man to make. Unsatisfactory devil he was, irritable, hard as nails, with a tongue like a rasp. Small wonder that Alicia detested him, preferred young Verney, who might be soft, but was kindly and thoughtful. The thought that Alicia detested him hurt. He frowned, twisting uneasily in his chair, as if some physical pain caught him.

'Detests me,' he thought resentfully, 'and small wonder. If she didn't—if she even liked me—what then ? Have I anything to give her, any more than I had at Carrick, when we spent most of our time trying to avoid each other ? Isn't it just the same now ?'

The waiter, switching on the electric light, stared at the thin Englishman, lounging in his big chair, and wondered if he were ill. His face looked so pallid; his hands, with their clearly marked veins, were so white. Then, as he watched, he saw the figure stiffen, the shoulders go back, and the man lifted his head and met his eyes across the room.

The waiter went over to him, asking, "Did you veash anyt'ing, sair?"

Louis nodded. "Apparendy; but I've just realized what it was."

Trying to look intelligent, the waiter queried, "Yess—you veash . . . ?"

"Oh"—Louis blinked his eyes, as if the light hurt them—"bring me another coffee."

It wouldn't be the same now, and he knew it. Alicia might be a thousand things he disliked, and not one of them mattered a damn. Alicia was—Alicia, and that was all there was to it. She had courage, grit, poise—she had so much that he admired—and she had contrived during the past weeks to make him understand—how it had happened. He had not known that she was the only woman in the world who mattered, or ever would matter, to Louis Silver.

The realization brought no sense of elation; rather, his depression increased. He couldn't tell her; if he did, she would feel that he was taking advantage of her position, trying to—make her pay for what he had done. Anyway, with Bendish dead only a couple of months she could not be expected to turn to another man, particularly a man who had been consistently unkind and brutal to her.

"I've got no money—not sufficient to attract Alicia," Louis mused. "And if I had, I don't see her being content to spend the rest of her life with me. Until this child is born she'll stay with me. Afterwards—how do I know what her plans are? Maybe she'll tell Verney—"

And again his heart was conscious of a little spurt of anger against Verney.

'I suppose that because I've not enough to do, because I've been ill and am still tottery, I've developed a kind of sentimental feeling for her. She's a beautiful woman; at times she's got a kind of gaiety which touches me; I feel that her position is pathetic. I should probably feel that for any woman who was forced to spend a good deal of her time with me ! I know myself so well ! I could so easily imagine that I was in love with her—and a pretty business it would be if I were ! In love—I've never been in love in my life ! Now—' again he moved irritably—'now—of course I'm not in love ! I'm going through a period when I find her attractive—nothing more. All this—what-might-have-been stuff ! It's worth nothing—it's sentimentality ! God !—in love with Alicia ! What preposterous rubbish !'

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER ONE

I

"**T**ELL THEM," SAID LOUIS SILVER, "THAT I DON'T intend to eat a huge meal in the middle of the day. On Christmas Day—for whatever it's worth—I'll eat like a Christian, in the evening. If they want paying extra, pay it!"

"There's to be a dance," Verney said, "here in the big dining-room. The band is coming from Innsbruck, and they've got the place all decorated, and the piano-tuner came yesterday."

"I heard him," Louis commented grimly. "You give them my message, Verney."

A dance! Queer to think that he might dance with Alicia again. It would be rather pleasant to wear decent clothes, to dance with a pretty woman dressed beautifully, to drink good wine, and forget that they were strangers in a strange land, and not in England, at Carrick. Of late he had thought a good deal about Carrick, wondering how the gardens were looking, and if the caretaker had looked after the big yellow stable-cat with the torn ear. During the last few days he had veered from trying to be amusing and friendly and had sunk back into a state of mind which was increasingly bitter and despondent.

He was stronger; able to walk down the path by the river without returning to feel that he had exhausted himself. He had watched Alicia dressed for walking, seen Verney spring to his feet and say, "I'll be ready in one minute—literally one minute," and had felt that he longed for them to ask him to accompany them.

Alicia said, "Are you going out, Louis? It's a heavenly morning."

"Yes, I shall go out——"

"You wouldn't care," she hesitated, "to—come with us, would you?"

"It's an idea." He had wondered if she heard the pleasure in his tone.

They set out, the clear cold air making their cheeks tingle, the hard snow crunching under their feet. Louis had listened with unusual tolerance to Verney's chatter. That was the house where the schoolmaster lived; that one with the painted shutters—pretty, weren't they?—was the house of the butcher, who owned most of the village. That tall young man who had just passed, who smiled and raised his cap to Mrs. Silver, was reputed to know more of the Tyrolean legends than anyone else in the district. Then the road narrowed, and it was impossible for them to walk three abreast. Verney walked ahead with Alicia, and Louis followed. Once or twice she laughed, and he couldn't hear what Verney had said to amuse her. He suggested that they might stop at the little inn, just along the high road, and have some coffee—or cognac or beer.

Alicia said, "Oh, we never indulge in those luxuries, do we, Francis?"

Louis felt irritated. "*We . . . do we, Francis?*"—and knew that he was unreasonable, but he almost hated Verney when he answered, "Rather not. We walk for walking's sake!" He sounded smugly satisfied. Louis imagined that the implication was that he was restricting their walk.

He said, "Well, I'm turning back. I'm not in training like you two."

"Oh, we'll come back with you," Alicia answered readily.

Verney added, "Of course we will."

"We" again!

"I'd rather walk back alone, thanks. Go on with your walk."

He had come back alone, and once, when he turned to look back, he saw how steadily they were swinging along. He watched them, hoping that Alicia might turn and wave to him. She didn't, and he went on his way, angry and disappointed. He'd walk with them no more. They didn't want him. He wasn't going to be odd-man-out for anyone.

Christmas Day came, and with it a parcel from Jane, sending him silk socks which she had knitted, and a card bearing a robin and some holly. There was a letter too, asking when she might expect him home, telling of her flat, which she liked better every day. Her words, saying how much she missed him, touched him, made his heart warmer.

He gave minute orders regarding the dinner, making Verney repeat them again and again, so that there might be no doubts in the mind of the management as to what—exactly—he wanted. He had never given half so much thought to the big dinner-parties at Carrick!

As he dressed he felt excited. He had not worn dress clothes for months. He'd got thinner; his suit didn't fit so well as it had done before he left England. Verney came in, parcels in his hands and wearing a dinner-jacket, a tie which was disgracefully tied and a shirt which was already creasing.

He stared, and said, "Oh—you're wearing tails! I've only got a dinner-jacket . . ."

Louis felt that he'd been behaving like a fool. Tails, white waistcoat and all the rest of it for a village pub! Making a poppy-show of himself, and why? Because he remembered that once Alicia had said, almost grudgingly, "You wear tails better than most men, don't you?"

Lying, he said, "I had to. I have no dinner-jacket with me—or if I have I can't find it. What are those parcels?"

"I thought that I'd show you what I bought—from

you to me. Paints and brushes, because I needed them badly, and they really are what I wanted. I think that it's so nice to get something you really want, not just something that—”

Louis said, “That's good, then. And the others?”
“For Mrs. Silver—I knew that she wanted—”

He knew what she wanted! He knew everything about her!

“Take them down and give them to her, then. I'll be down in five minutes.”

“Surely you'll give them to her yourself, won't you? I'm certain that she'd rather—”

“I'm certain that you know everything my wife likes and dislikes!” he snapped back. “Only just do as you are told, if you please. Either give them to her or put them in her room.”

“Very well, Mr. Silver.”

He turned back to the mirror and settled his immaculate tie. That had begun Verney's evening badly for him at all events! For two pins he'd tell Verney that it was time he moved on, only the fellow was useful. He looked after Alicia, and—oh, Verney wasn't such a bad chap, if only he'd get out of the habit of assuring people that he knew this, that and the next thing that Mrs. Silver liked or disliked!

Louis went down, descending the stairs slowly, sniffing the mixed odours of roasting goose, bruised evergreens, hot candle-wax, and the sudden gusts of steamy, beer-laden heat which rushed out every time the door of the bar-room was opened. As he passed, the servants bobbed curtsies, thanked him for presents, smiled and sent glances of obvious admiration at his clothes. He grinned, looking suddenly years younger, nodded and shook hands, saying firmly, “A Happy Christmas.”

At the door of the dining-room he halted for a moment. He was behaving like a schoolboy; his heart was beating very fast, his breath coming a little unevenly. He went in.

Alicia came forward, looking as she used to do at Carrick ; her long dress caught the light, shimmering and looking, Louis thought, like water. In such a manner he had seen her a hundred times greet her guests.

"My dear—how grand you are ! I've put my presents on the tree—we'll all open them during dessert. Oh, there is dessert, because I got it in Innsbruck the day when Francis and I went shopping. They wanted to put the champagne on the table now—they regard it as a kind of decoration, I fancy. I sent it back to be kept cool."

"Don't let them freeze it to death," Louis warned. "Verney, tell 'em that we don't want the life frozen out of the stuff. Alicia—you look very charming. . . ."

His good spirits remained with him throughout dinner ; only when Alicia gave out the packets which held their presents did depression descend on him again. He found himself incapable of saying more than "Thank you very much—thanks awfully", and "Very kind of you, Verney, thanks." Verney and Alicia were like children. He watched them, feeling lonely and unhappy. Such presents ! Alicia delighted over gloves and silk stockings, a new novel from England, a box of sweets, and scent and soap. Last year she had taken a gold cigarette-case and said, "It's quite charming, thank you so much" ; this year she was ecstatic over this collection of rubbish !

Louis said, "When you've both finished enthusing over your presents, might I remind you that the band is playing and the festivities have begun ?"

The room was hot ; the young men in stiff clothes and starched collars looked less attractive than when he met them in the village, wearing *Leder-Hosen* and embroidered braces. They seemed to move less easily, to have lost some of their natural dignity. Only when they danced their own country dances did they appear completely charming and natural once again.

They stared at Alicia with open-eyed admiration. There was nothing either curious or subservient in their glances; they were merely ready to admit her beauty; the women watched her with looks in which there were neither envy nor disdain. They were too well bred not to realize that these strangers had other customs, belonged to a class better off than their own, and neither facts mattered sufficiently to make them uncomfortable or ill-mannered.

Verney said, "Nice people, aren't they? Will you dance this with me, Mrs. Silver? I don't dance awfully well, but I do enjoy it. I'll try very hard not to tread on your toes. No, I'm not as bad as that really——"

"If you don't stop him, Alicia," Louis said, "the dance will be over."

He sat watching them, thinking, 'Soon I'll ask her to dance,' conscious that he was looking forward to the moment, hoping that he was not out of practice, longing that she should say when their dance together was over that she had enjoyed it. To dance with her meant holding her in his arms—meant that the scent of her hair would reach him, his hands brush her bare arms, his face be very close to hers.

Verney was bringing her back. They were laughing together.

"The floor is really quite good," Verney said.

"And my partner—matched the floor," Alicia laughed.

Again she sat beside Louis, while Verney went off to dance some intricate Tyrolean dance, partnering a slim girl with golden hair and large china-blue eyes.

"It's nice, isn't it?" Alicia said. "Thank you for giving me such a pleasant Christmas, Louis."

"You remember last Christmas?"

She nodded. "At Carwick. That wasn't so nice as this." He wondered if last Christmas she had already fallen in love with Beindish. "I know it sounds preposterous to say it, but my presents this year matter a

great deal more than those exquisite things you gave me last year."

"I didn't buy them," Louis said. "I sent Verney out to get them, while I sat and drank black coffee."

"Oh!"—her voice had lost some of its warmth. "But you told him what to get, and—"

"Not even that," he insisted. "I merely gave him some money and told him to go shopping."

"Ah"—she refused to be hurt—"then, by this process of elimination, you at least provided the money."

"I did," he admitted. "Nothing particularly difficult in that. Will you dance with me, Alicia?"

"Of course; but not this one—I hate these jumpy tunes. There, it's just ending. Francis is very attentive to his fair-haired girl. I think he must be smitten with her charms, don't you?"

"I thought that he was irreversibly smitten with yours."

"Only because he would like to paint me. It's purely artistic interest."

Louis grinned. He was feeling secure and happy. "Be honest—surely not entirely?"

"Entirely—now. At first—I don't know. He's a romantic youth, our Francis."

"Our Francis!" Louis exclaimed. "I have no proprietary interest. Come, let's dance."

II

He was back, watching the dancers, while Alicia danced again with Verney, whose fair skin had flushed, making his hair look lighter and more tow-like than ever. From time to time he pushed back the heavy lock which fell over his forehead, laughing as he did so. Once Louis caught Alicia's voice, clear-cut and amused. "Why don't you have it cut shorter? You give yourself so much trouble pushing it back."

He had danced, held her in his arms, heard her say, "You dance awfully well, Louis. Not an elaborate dancer, but—terribly sound."

"I wish I were that—in everything."

"Surely it's exactly what you are!"

"Christmas is making you indulgent, Alicia."

She laughed. "That's something, at all events."

He had felt tired before the dance ended, but he refused to stop; felt that he wanted every possible second, so that he might remember them separately, looking back on everything in minute detail. Her scent, her hair—that pale-gold hair—the smooth skin, with a faint polish on it, yet not shining—definitely matt; the curve of her neck and the sudden glint of white teeth when she laughed. As he took her back to her seat she looked at him anxiously, making his heart beat more rapidly because he caught her expression, and it delighted him to think that she cared how he felt.

"You've danced too long—you're tired."

"Not a bit of it! Give me ten minutes and—shall we dance again?"

"You're certain that it's not too much for you?"

"You ought to know that I always put myself and my own feelings first." Again that smile, which just flickered round her lips and was reflected for a second in her eyes.

"Ought I?"

With his eyes following Alicia, Louis sat very still, his hands lying loosely on his knees, his face intent and serious. He experienced a queer sensation that he was facing a crisis. He knew that sooner or later he would find it imperative to tell Alicia that he loved her; he would hear how she reacted to that statement, and together they would be forced to face a future which must inevitably bring them closer together, or divide their lives entirely and finally. The contemplation made him draw his breath sharply. To lose her—it was

unthinkable ; to recover her, with some kind of affection and understanding, was not without its problems.

'Problems,' he mused. 'No change in having problems. I've faced them and solved them all my life. That shan't frighten me. I made money and I can make it again.'

She came back to him, laughing and teasing Verney about the girl with the fair hair. Verney blushed, stammered and kept assuring them that : "It's all nothing, nothing at all. She's the daughter of the clock-maker. Such a decent chap, with some really wonderful old clocks, and a real knowledge of his craft. Not just a trade—a craft."

Louis thought, 'It's queer ; here are Alicia and I teasing him. She and I—uniting to tease him. Strange how pleasant it is to feel that someone's "on your side", even when it's only to joke.'

When Verney went off to dance again, Louis said, "By Jove, it's hot in here ! Let me take you into the dining-room. We might have some wine, eh ?"

She laughed. "Wine—you mean champagne, don't you ? My dear, we might be back at Carrick—only the champagne will prove to us that we're not."

"Do you—do you ever wish that we—you were back at Carrick ?" he asked.

"Who wouldn't ? And yet I don't know. There isn't much—going back and making a success of things, is there ?"

"I don't know . . ." He had ordered the wine ; they were sitting alone in the dining-room, where the big Christmas-tree scintillated and glittered, where the silver threads—known as "angel's hair"—floated in the faint breath of air which entered through the open door. "I don't know. I've never gone back, I believe in beginning again—fresh starts. That's what I want to do, when I get back to work. Make a new start—in a new place."

"Then you don't plan to go back to Melbrough?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No, I should hate it. If ever I do go back it will be because I've made another fortune—not until. I couldn't bear people to pity me, to point me out as a man who was successful—once upon a time."

The tall young son of the house brought the wine, and would have poured it out, but Louis said impatiently: "No, no—let me do it! That's no way to handle a bottle of wine." The young man stared at him blankly, smiled sheepishly, and said, "*Bitte, Herr Silber.*"

Louis splashed some wine into his glass, tasted it, and said, "Not bad. Just a trifle sweet, but—drinkable."

Turning to the young man, who stood watching, he said, "Give me a glass. Have a drink with us—Merry Christmas!"

Alicia translated. The fellow clicked his heels together, bowed from the waist and, lifting his glass, said, "*Ich wünsche Sie geehrter Herr und Frau noch grossere Frönen lichtkeit den Sie heut Abend erfahren.*"

Setting down his glass, bowing again, he left them.

Louis said, "And what does that mean? Curse this lack of understanding!"

"It means," Alicia said, speaking slowly—and, Louis felt, almost unwillingly—"it means: 'Honoured sir and madam, I wish you even greater happiness in the future than you experience—have known—this night.'" She added quickly, "It's a polite expression of—what shall I say?—a rather formal Christmas wish, that's all."

For the first time that evening she saw the old sneering expression cross his face. "My dear Alicia," he said, "don't think that I was going to—presume. I am sure that it was purely formal."

She sighed. "Oh, Louis—couldn't you have forgotten to be unkind, just for this evening?"

"I'm sorry. Sit down, Alicia; listen to me." He caught her hand and drew her down on to the broad

velvet seat which ran round part of the wall. "I've been having a difficult time these last few days. I've told myself that I was a fool—all kinds of fools. I've argued with myself, reasoned, even laughed at myself. It's been no use. I've lost. I know that I have been pretty well everything that's unpleasant. I've sneered, bullied, been consistently unkind, rubbed heavy fingers over scars which should have been touched lightly. I've resented when you were laughing with Verney, I've tried to find fault with everything you did or said—and I've failed. I tried to safeguard myself, to be strong, to stand alone. I've lost that fight—lost it when I sat in the hotel at Innsbruck the other day and saw clearly that there was only one thing could make me happy, knew that there was only one thing in the world that I wanted, longed for. That last sneer was—my last trench. A poor, pathetically small effort to be the man you've always known, who distrusts warm, soft, tender things—or," he spoke very softly, "did—once upon a time."

He leaned forward, saw her face very white and lacking in expression. Then he had made her angry. She was going to tell him that her heart had never come to Steinach at all, that she had left it with Roger Bendish. He said, very softly, "Alicia—speak to me, for God's sake speak to me!"

"What can I say? Do you really mean that you—you love me, Louis?"

"Of course"—impatiently. "What else could I mean?"

"And you want us to—begin again—make a new start?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Alicia, don't ask questions, answer me! Do you—can you love me—ever, do you think?"

"I don't know. I don't believe that I dare think of it. . . ." Suddenly she covered her face with her hands.

The door of the room burst open and a crowd of young people entered, laughing and singing. Louis started to his feet, his face twisted with fury.

"What the devil do you mean, bursting in here?" he demanded. "For God's sake stop that filthy row! Make less noise, can't you? I tell—"

Alicia caught his hand. "Louis, it's a public room. They've a right to come in." Then, turning to the group, she said something in rapid German, even smiling as she spoke. Louis fancied that she was telling them that he had been joking. Astonishing to be able to keep her wits about her at that moment. He thought, 'She's wonderful, my Alicia.'

The boys and girls laughed, bowed; one of them evidently protested that they had imagined the room to be empty. Alicia gave them smile for smile, courtesy for courtesy. The difficult moment was over.

She said to Louis, "It's impossible to talk here. . . ."

"Obviously! Listen—let me come to your room. No, no, I've not the slightest intention of making myself—tedious. Only, this is a matter of life or death—it means everything to me."

"Very well. But—" She stopped, watching him closely. "You're tired!"

"Desperately. But so are you—oh, don't deny it! I'll come up in half an hour. I'll go back and tell Verney that you've gone to bed, and come up."

She nodded, her eyes grave and dark with thought. Louis made his way back to the ballroom. The heat seemed to rush at him like a wave, the noise was almost a physical blow. He stood watching the moving mass of people, hearing the shrill wailing of the violins, the heavier notes of the piano, and the brutal blare of the village cornet. He had faced the biggest moment of his life within a few yards of all these people; he had come back to watch them, feeling that he had returned from another world. It seemed impossible that they should not see some change in him, that in catching sight of him they should not nudge each other, saying, "Look at that man—how changed he looks!"

When the dance ended Verney came over, wiping his face with his handkerchief, and panting a little, saying, "That polka takes it out of you. I should think I've lost a couple of pounds. It's fun, though! What a grand evening!"

Louis said, "Look here, go on dancing, but I'm off to bed. Alicia's gone. She asked me to say 'good night' to you for her. Have a good time."

"Don't you feel well?"

"My dear fellow, perfectly well. I tell you I'm tired. By the way, there's three parts of a bottle of champagne in the dining-room. Take your little fair-haired friend to sample it."

"That's awfully good of you——"

"To give you something I don't want? Surely! Good night, Verney."

"Good night, Mr. Silver."

As he passed the door of the bar-room was open; he heard a snatch of a song, something about "Tirolerland"—immensely patriotic, these people. Vaguely he wondered what would happen to them if Germany cast eyes in their direction. They'd be good haters, he fancied. They might not fight much, but they'd nurse their wrongs, and one day flare out, maybe do desperate things. They were a fine people, with their broad shoulders and clear eyes. The hotel-keeper, stout and bald, saw him and nodded a "good evening". On the stairs the little chambermaid, smiling and nodding, accosted him, pouring out a flood of words; thanking him for the present which he had bought for her. He smiled in return and went on up the stairs, thinking, 'And I didn't even bother to find out what Verney had got for *her*.'

He felt no sensation of nervousness, scarcely any apprehension. The thing was too big, too inevitable. He dared not even speculate what would happen should Alicia tell him that she could never care for him. He was certain of his own feelings; he had told her—and

for the rest he must accept what Fate had in store for him. The thought which was uppermost in his mind at the moment was that he would see her again, that she was waiting at the end of the long corridor, willing to listen to him, to talk of this thing which had come to him.

He knocked, heard her bid him enter, and went in. Alicia was wearing a silk dressing-gown, tied with a sash round the waist. It was very plain, like a man's garment. Louis caught sight of her nightgown showing below the hem of the silk robe. She indicated her dress, and said, "I was so tired. You don't mind?"

"Mind? No." His voice betrayed no emotion. He caught sight of the little cat curled round in the centre of Alicia's bed. "Oh, so you've stolen my cat, have you?"

"I didn't steal it," she said, "it just arrived. It gets cold, I think."

He said, "Perhaps. It's a very pleasant little person."

"Louis—" she made a little movement in his direction—"Louis—we must talk about what you told me downstairs just now."

"Yes—" He knew that suddenly he was shaking, and clenched his teeth to keep his jaws steady.

"Did you mean—" she spoke slowly, and softly—"did you mean that you really loved me? That you wanted us to begin again?"

He nodded.

"Knowing—everything? Not trying to forget things that have happened?"

"Knowing everything, not trying to forget anything," he said.

She leaned against the end of the bed, her eyes steady as they watched him.

"Well?" Louis said harshly. "Well—what have you got to say?"

"I think that you must go away," she said, "or I

must. I don't think that you have faced facts, Louis. You've forgotten, made yourself forget things. You say that you love me; I believe you. You aren't the kind of man who lies. My baby—mine and Roger's—will be born in five months' time. That shakes you—my dear."

"No," Louis protested. "Why should it? I know it's going to happen. I don't say that it's easy to look forward to. I don't even say that I hadn't pushed that fact out of my mind. I only remembered it—at night, when I couldn't sleep." He shivered. "Then I had to face it."

"You hated it?" she asked.

"Hated it?" He moved impatiently. "I don't tell you that I liked it, but if we go on again together I've got to take that in my stride. It's *you*—you're what matters. I can face anything if I have you. That's—extraneous. It's *got* to be. I can show you that I don't always need to be hard, Alicia; I can show you that there is another side to me. If you care sufficiently you can help me to—well, to be a more pleasant person. I don't ask you to swear that you love me—*now*; I only want you to know that I have realized what you mean to me. I cannot face life without you. The last week's been hell. I've remembered all the times when I've—quite consciously—hurt you, wounded you. I've been regretful, ashamed, felt disgusted with myself. Alicia, can't you see that I love you, that I mean all I say? It's not only because you're beautiful—I never realized how beautiful until now—"

She came to him, laid her hand on his shoulder. "Poor Louis! I still say that either you or I must go away. For myself—I don't know what I feel. I'm conscious that I am glad when you're kind, that I'm grateful, far more grateful than you will ever know. I like to be with you. The day you drove away with Francis I longed to say, 'Take me with you.' Tonight—I shall always remember tonight. But I must be fair; we must both be fair. You said just now it was not only because you

thought me beautiful that you loved me. Have you remembered that in another month—two months—I shan't look as I do now? I know you sufficiently well, Louis. You could never bear to watch me, to see me growing—”

He wrenched himself away from her hand. “God, don’t!” he said violently. “I didn’t think—didn’t give myself time to think.” He stood staring at her, his eyes wide, his whole face expressing horror. She realized that he had seen the lines of her figure under the thin silk dressing-gown, noticed how already they had lost something of their fine outline. “You’re right,” he said, licking his dry lips nervously. “I’m sorry, I couldn’t—face it. I love you too much. Stay here, Alicia—I’ll go.”

“One day—one day, will you come back?” Alicia said softly.

“I don’t know—I can’t tell you.”

A second later and he had gone, leaving her staring out of the window at the snow-covered hills on which the moon shone steadily and clearly.

CHAPTER TWO

I

HE HADN'T SLEPT; SO FAR HAD SLEEP FELT FROM HIS eyes it had not seemed worth while to go to bed. He had taken off his clothes, folding them neatly because that was his habit—he did everything neatly—and as he placed them in his suit-case his lips twisted, recalling in what a state of almost youthful expectancy he had put them on only a few hours before. His packing finished, he sat down near the fire, already burning sulkily, as fires do when the dawn is approaching, and tried to realize what had happened.

He had told Alicia that he loved her; he had stripped himself of all those weapons which he had used so long—snarling, sneering, rating everything at its lowest possible value—he had been simple and direct. Down in the dining-room, with its velvet seats, its bright Christmas-tree and its huge pale-blue Meissen china stove, he had felt that life was opening out before him. Alicia had been kind; she had been happy that they were able to laugh together, and he had felt secure and hopeful.

He had pushed the thought of Roger Bendish's child from his mind; he had glossed over the gravity of its birth, had neglected to consider how-loving Alicia—that birth might affect him. When the thought had intruded he had pushed it away, assuring himself that he'd be good to the child, that he'd never allow it to suffer in any way; he'd—yes—he'd let the whole world believe that it was his own.

And Alicia herself had shattered everything, had made him realize that there were months to face when it would be apparent that she was going to have a child.

People would glance at her, look at her husband, try to cheer him, ask him if he hoped the child would be a boy or did he prefer a daughter. Assuming that he was the father, people would ask those questions, damn them! She would lose that smooth grace which he loved; her figure would change, grow clumsy and unwieldy; her face become heavy and tired. Those were the things that frightened him. The knowledge that he had to face a constant and ever-increasing reminder that, beneath her heart, she—Alicia—carried her dead lover's child.

She had asked if he would come back. How did he know? How could he tell? To come back and find her nursing a child—as the young woman in the hotel nursed hers—watching it while it slept, speculating as to whether or not it looked like Roger Bendish. Did women of Alicia's type feed their children? He didn't know. That would be a new source of torture, to watch her giving the child—herself, as she had given her love and her body to Bendish.

Louis sprang to his feet, his hands clenched, his eyes staring, his whole face distorted with pain.

"Curse him!" he whispered, and the words were intensified by their spoken softness. "Damn him! He's had everything—I've had nothing! He took what he wanted while he was alive, and even now he's dead he still clutches, possesses, holds on to what might have been mine!"

As morning dawned he lay back in his chair exhausted, cold and utterly wretched. He must go, and go quickly. Better not to see Alicia again; he couldn't face it, and his mind halted because he had so rarely considered anyone except himself—scenes couldn't be good for her. Then slowly a faint recollection filtered into his brain. When she first told him about herself and Bendish, when she had asked him to take her back, he had spoken of—Paris. She had refused; not indignantly—Alicia didn't often grow indignant—but quite calmly. Now—if she had

any spark of love for him, she might feel differently. She might listen to his advice, accept this simplification of all their difficulties. He imagined himself speaking to her, holding her hand, laying it against his cheek, whispering that he would take care of her—always, always, always.

His hands were shaking, but he contrived to shave, swearing under his breath as he nicked his chin. He found the bath-water scarcely warm, but what did that matter! He felt the glow returning to his skin as he towelled his body vigorously. The church clock struck the half-hour. It was half past seven. The servants would be up; he could risk going along to Alicia's room. He knew that, at a very early hour, she had tea brought to her. How like Alicia to insist upon having tea, even though she was living in a little hotel in Austrian Tirol! He smiled for the first time, feeling not only tolerant but amused by her idiosyncrasies. Dear Alicia.

As he left his room, he met the little chambermaid, bearing Alicia's morning tray. He took it from her, tapped his chest with his forefinger and said, "I—I will take it—" She laughed, nodded and scuttled back down the corridor, glad to be released for her other duties. Louis knocked on the door, heard Alicia's voice speaking German and entered.

She was sitting up in bed, with a soft silk wrap round her shoulders. His first thought was, 'God, how tired she looks!' He said, "I've brought your tea. I wanted to speak to you. Don't be afraid. I'm not going to upset you."

"Is there anything to say, Louis?"

"Yes—" He set down the tray and walked to the window, speaking with his back towards her. "Yes, there is—if I can say it. Alicia—when you first came here, I said, 'There is Paris.' You knew what I meant, you remember? Well, now—I love you—you like me—more, I think, than you've ever done—Paris is still possible. I'll take you there—today, stay with ~~you~~—God, I'm saying

this badly——!” He knew that the sweat was on his forehead ; he wiped it away with the back of his hand, then swung round, saying urgently, “Alicia—understand, don’t hate me.”

To his surprise, she held out her hand ; he took it and she drew him towards her, saying, “Sit down there, on the bed, Louis.” Then, laughing shakily, she added, “You’ve never done that in your life, have you ?”

“No,” he said. “It’s different though—now.”

“Yes, it’s different now, but you mustn’t make those suggestions to me,” she said gently ; “they are impossible—and I can’t bear to see you suffer. I mean that. I’ve done enough harm ; I’ve got sufficient sins to my account—don’t try to persuade me to add another.”

“Another——?” He stared. “But you’re not religious, Alicia.”

“No—it might have been better for me if I had had some religion, but I can’t do that, Louis. Not because it’s——” she steadied her voice—“not because it’s Roger’s child, but because it’s mine. Mine, do you see ? I’m responsible. I can’t rob it of its life—I can’t murder my own child. I went into this with my eyes open, and I won’t shirk the consequences. It wouldn’t help us, Louis—it would be a barrier between us always.”

“Then—what’s to happen ?” His voice was heavy with misery.

“I think,” she said slowly, “that you must go away, as you intended to do last night. It’s better—it’s right, and after all only just, that I should see this through alone. It will be easier for me.”

He covered his face with his hands ; she saw his shoulders shaking.

“Louis,” she said. “Louis——”

His muffled words reached her through his fingers. “I’m a coward,” he said. “I protest that I love you—and I—can’t stay. It’s no use. I should lose everything I’ve gained. I should be the intolerant, sneering brute you’ve

always known. I—I—couldn't stand it. But you're right—about not—going with me to—Paris. I can say that, at least."

He raised his head, and watching his face, Alicia said softly, "It would be so much easier if we still hated one another—"

"Dear God, don't I know that!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I even wish that I could blame you for making me care for you!"

"Don't," she said—"don't wish that, because—we have—at last—found something beautiful, even if we have only caught a glimpse of it."

Frowning, he sprang to his feet. "Hell, don't talk about beauty to me! Where the devil is there any beauty in this business? Not for me—it's sheer damnation for me. A couple of dances in a hot ballroom, a few sentences which made me imagine wild things, and read into whatever you said something which—probably—didn't exist at all. A bottle of indifferent wine—left unfinished. You call that beauty?"

"No—not just those things—"

"I don't know what else there is. Good-bye, Alicia. I'll see that Verney looks after you. Even Verney is luckier than I am—damn him!"

"Good-bye, Louis."

She held out her hands to him; he took them, lifted them to his lips; she felt the hard pressure of his mouth, then he dropped them and, without looking at her again, walked out of the room.

II

"Oh, Verney, give me ten minutes."

"As many as you like, Mr. Silver." Verney looked washed out after his late night; there were blue shadows under his eyes, his hair seemed to have lost its colour, it was more indefinite than ever.

"Sit down," Louis said. "Look here, I'm leaving this morning. Going back to England. I don't know how long you planned to stay here, but I should be glad if you'd stay—as long as possible. Look after—my wife. Here's money—it's about fifty pounds, I reckon. I'll send you more from England. I don't want her to go short of anything. There must be nurses, doctors—whatever she needs, no—not needs, *wants*."

"You're going—" Verney's mouth fell open. "Going—back to England?"

"Wasn't that what I said? There's the money; sign that receipt, will you? That's not unfriendliness or distrust—it's business. This address will always find me. I'll leave you the car; it may be useful. Take it over the border when the six months is up, and—is your licence all right? Don't run any silly risks. There, I must be off—"

Verney stammered regrets. Clearly he was astonished, almost shaken. Louis stared at his pale eyes, swimming with tears, and thought with astonishment, 'The fellow's actually sorry that I'm going!' He felt no regret at leaving Verney, in leaving Austria. His whole mind was full of Alicia; the consciousness of his own pain made him impervious to the pain of others—even hers. In the train, as it sped across Europe, he tried to make plans, only to find that his mind was a blank. The wheels of the train seemed to grind out Alicia's name. He felt that long before he reached England he would have been driven crazy by them. The scenery through which he passed held no interest for him; he was only sensible to the fact that each mile carried him farther and farther away from her. Again and again he heard his own cry, "I couldn't stand it!" ; heard her voice, gentle and kind. Strange to have that recollection of Alicia—gentle and kind. Until that day in the Carrick woods he had never imagined that she could be either. But then he had never imagined that he could have cared for her as he did.

Was that what she meant by saying that they had found something beautiful? Not much beauty in having your very guts twisted! Beauty!

He slept a little, and woke to stare out at the landscape, his heart still filled with resentment, not only against fate but against his own lack of courage. If he had stayed—if he had not wilted before the sudden picture which she drew for him—what then? He twisted impatiently; what the devil was the use of speculating? Things had gone wrong; the dice had been weighted against them both. Some evil influence had prompted Alicia to take the line she had, and she had found the chink in his armour.

Deciding not to spend the night in London, he caught a north-bound train, and arrived at Melbrough in the chilly hours of the early morning. Jane was bustling about her flat when he arrived. She opened the door to him. His first sight of her was standing there, astonishment written on her face, her hair smooth as he had always known it—but it had grown more grey. She was even wearing the same kind of blue-and-white checked apron which he remembered she reserved for mornings.

"I like to be well covered up whiles I do my bits o' work"; she had said that as long ago as he could remember.

"Why—Loo!" she gasped. "I never expected to see you. I felt certain as it was the milk. That lad gets later an' later. I doubt as I shall have ter change—I've spoke and spoke, but nothing alters him. Come in, come in, Loo dear—you'll be ready for breakfast. Let's tak' a look at you." She held him at arm's length, scanning his face. "Eh, my dear, but you've gone thin. It's that nasty pneumonia. Oh, wasn't I worried, until I 'ad a line from that young man saying as you were on the mend. Did you have a good doctor? And a nurse—did you have a nurse, Loo?"

She hustled about, hurrying backwards and forwards from the little dining-room to the kitchen, talking all the time, explaining that "The girl doesn't come while 'arf

past eight. Gives me time ter 'ave my breakfast over, then she can get 'ers. Like the rest on 'em, Loo, she takes 'er time getting it an' all."

The coffee was good, the eggs and bacon were perfectly cooked, the toast was crisp and hot. Louis smiled at his mother across the table.

"This is something like a breakfast," he said.

"Aye—though I says it—few can beat me at cooking anything. Always provided as it's not fancy cooking. Remember that fancy cooking at Carrick! I always knew as that was Alicia's idea and not yours."

He felt that the sound of her name came as a shock. He knew that he must make explanations, talk about her, listen to comments. It was bound to hurt, to hurt desperately.

"Oh—Alicia's changed a lot," he said, trying to speak easily.

"There was room for it," Jane sniffed; then asked sharply, "'Ow do you come to know?"

"Well . . . Do you mind if I smoke? It's good to get Virginian cigarettes again. Well, the divorce is off, Jane. Yes, curious how it turned out. I met Alicia in Innsbruck, and—oh, we met by chance—it seemed silly to go on with something which, quite frankly, neither of us wanted in the least. She forgave me—very generously—and instructed her solicitors not to proceed any further. That's the story."

Jane nodded. "So that's the story is it?"

"I said so—" His nerves were raw; he felt that he couldn't face questions and comments. He wanted peace—he meant to have it.

"I 'eard you," she said grimly. "Look 'ere, Loo. I don't mean to try and pry into anything, but I did know something before, and that first tale never seemed to me to 'old water, no more does this one. I never believed as you misconducted yourself with any loose woman, and I did know as Alicia got 'erself talked about mor'n a goodish bit with young—"

Louis rose, and flung his cigarette into the fire with a gesture violent in its intensity. "Look here, Mother, I can't discuss Alicia. It must suffice for you—for everyone—to know that Alicia has been with me for several months. To be exact—four—just over."

"Where? In this village in Austria?"

"Of course; where else?"

"But I mind on my birthday—that's October the ninth, Lou—I'd a card from you somewhere in France."

"My dear Jane, geography has never been your strong point. Anyway, most of these places look alike—on post-cards."

She nodded. "Maybe. Did you 'ear as young Bendish was dead? Killed in Switzerland, was it? I have the cutting somewhere about it."

He was busy lighting a second cigarette with great care. "Yes, I heard."

She did not continue her questions, but her keen old eyes were puzzled, and during the morning as she went about her work she stopped from time to time, pinching her lower lip between her finger and thumb. More than once when "the girl" put some questions to her she fancied that her mistress started as if she had been dragged back from some absorbing thoughts of her own.

Louis, bathed and changed, went out into the town, carefully avoiding the main thoroughfares, keeping to those small streets which he knew so well, and where he was unlikely to meet anyone. He could not have said why he turned his steps toward the old warehouse, except that in his mind there remained some vague belief that as his success had begun there it might be a fitting place to start again. He had always been superstitious about Fosdick's.

He stood and viewed the place from the other side of the road. Cohen had smartened it up a good deal; there was plenty of bright paint and some gold lettering. Paint was cheap enough, but why use gold? A bright yellow looked almost as well, and cost quarter the money.

Smoking and laughing, two of the carters stood leaning against a lorry. Louis frowned. Cohen must be growing slack to allow his men to waste their time. He longed to go over to them and order them to "get on with it". He walked over and entered the warehouse, sniffing the familiar odour of fruit and vegetables. His quick eyes scanned everything. The well-stocked baskets were neatly arranged; even the floor was moderately clean. He went over to the office, put his head inside the door and said, "Hello, Cohen."

Cohen scrambled off his stool with a haste that was almost ludicrous.

"Mister Thilver! Vot a surprise! I never expected to thee you! My vord, yer look poorly! Bin ill? Whers have you been, by the vay?"

"Lots of places." He mustn't make his movements known to everyone. People took two and two, and, adding them together, made five!

Cohen, kindly and fussy, dragged up a chair. "Sit down, sit down. Now tell me—looks to me as if you'd hed a bad time."

Louis nodded. "Yes, on the whole, I suppose that I have had a bad time."

"Not—want of money, Mister Thilver—?"—anxiously.

"No, not that, Cohen. How's business?—that's more interesting than my affairs. Booming along?"

Cohen came a little nearer and lowered his voice. "Couldn't be better. Or if it were—well, I'd scarcely trust it. It 'ud be too damn' good; see what I mean? I've got the chianth to open a place in Liverpool. It's this vay—the wife's had a bit of money left her. Her father—on him be peace—died a month ago. Alwayth got a head for huthineth, has Becky. You remember my quissus, don't you? Ah, I knew you would. Always speakth tho kindly of you, Becky does."

He went rambling on, praising his wife's ability to

"sthpot a good thing", told how a cousin of hers had an interest in fruit boats running from various parts of the world, how he believed that a place in Liverpool, catering not only for the cheap and popular types of fruit, but for the more exclusive kinds, would pay "hand over fist, Misther Thilver". Becky, it appeared, had a cool five thousand to invest—"lying at the bank now while we're talking, if you ever heard of such a thing!" ; "her cousin promised another couple, and—"

"And I," said Louis Silver, "can promise another two—if I can have a job, Cohen."

"Are you therious?" Cohen leant forward, his hands on his knees. "You—with your ability, why—" he paused. "And anyway—I'd alwayth give a job to a Jew—spethially in these days. I can't help wondering—forgive me—if you've bin in Germany, if that's where you've had such a bad time?"

"Must one go to Germany—to have a bad time?" Louis asked.

Cohen shook his head. "Not on your life. I understand. No names, no pack-drill, Misther Thilver."

"If we're to be partners," Louis said, "why not drop the Mister?"

Cohen beamed at him through his horn-rimmed, immensely strong lenses.

"Thilver—then. I'll write to Albert tonight. That's his name—Albert Lawson; don't mind telling you it was Levy once upon a time. I'll tell him I've found a manager. A Jew—I'll say your nameth Thilver, but you yourself are—gold." He laughed. "Might change your name to Goldsmidt!"

Louis Silver felt surprisingly and suddenly moved. Here was this kind, hard-working, decent little man ready to place the new venture in his hands. He was ready to trust him, believe in him. Cohen knew that he'd failed. Admittedly he had paid his debts, but he had lost—what had been—a fortune. How many men would have

accepted him so readily, have offered sympathy, and proved their friendship as Cohen had done?

Louis faced the stout little Jew, his face grave. "Listen, Cohen," he said; "let's start straight. I lost all my money; you know that."

"Vat about it? Plenty of men's unlucky once in a way. Nothing of the *shlemiehl* about you, Thilver?"

"Honestly I don't think there is. Anyway, I've learnt wisdom. Learnt that you've got to be selective. However, another thing—I've not been in Germany. Don't think that my—looks have anything to do with—politics. I haven't suffered politically."

Cohen wagged his head. "Vell, ain't private troubles the worst kind? I'm thorrier than ever, Thilver."

"Thank you." His face was still very grave. "And, Cohen, I'm not a Jew. My father was an Irishman—Liverpool Irish. My mother's a Yorkshirewoman."

Cohen's face showed intense surprise. His eyes behind their glasses almost goggled. "Not a Jew—?" he stammered. "You ain't a Jew? Vell, I never heard anything like it. I always thought you were; everyone thought you were. You mean that you—*let 'em think tho'?*"

"I did. You see, I realized that, whatever the Jew is, or is not, he has a reputation for business ability, for finance, for making money. When I found that men were ready to imagine that I was a Jew, I took care never to contradict them. Only—I'd like to start on the dead level with you in this new concern, Cohen; that's why I felt that—"

Cohen flung back his head, pressed his pudgy hands to his fat sides and rolled backwards and forwards, almost suffocating himself with his laughter. "What do you know about it?" he spluttered. "Ain't this a clever men, this Thilver? Knows vat the goyim think of the Jews and tho—maketh believe that he'sh one! Thtarting off with the odds on him! Oh, ith's my lucky day when you come along just now. Vat a chen to tell Becky tonight!"

"But," Louis said, still speaking gravely, "I don't

know that I ever brought much credit to your race. I wasn't a particularly pleasant or over-scrupulous person, you know. Not even a popular fellow."

"Get away!" Cohen exclaimed, still wiping his eyes. "Get away! As straight a man in buthiness as I ever wish to meet. Not only I thay that—everyone thays it. Don't you get a bad opinion of yourself, or you'll find other folks only too ready to share it with you. Now—you'd go to Liverpool any time? Albert's found the place—it only needs you to start organizing. You an' me an' Becky and Albert will get together and talk buthiness. Could you thlip in tomorrow?"

That night he told Jane, "I'm no longer one of the unemployed. I've fixed a job with Cohen. My old love—the fruit business."

She regarded him intently, her steady eyes narrowed a little as if she tried to see what was going on in his mind behind the spoken words.

"With Cohen," she said quietly; "that's funny, isn't it, Loo? Back where you started, as it were. In Mellborough?"

"Liverpool," he said, watching the leaping flames of the bright fire. How pleasant it was to see coal fires after those tall china stoves! With that thought came the recollection of how he had sat with Alicia beside the big stove in the dining-room at Steinach, and tried to tell her all he felt and knew. "Liverpool," he repeated mechanically.

Jane said, "Loo dear, I'm not going to ask questions, an' if I did, as like as not you wouldn't answer them, but I don't want to see you make no more mistakes. Something went wrong, some'ow, somewhere—that I do know. I've sometimes thought as you wanted to buy everything, an' forgot there is still things as can't be bought. Reely it's the beautifullest things as money can't buy for you. I mind a old song—well, not so old—I 'eard a gentleman sing at the 'ippodrome. It went, 'There are so many

kind of riches, an' only one of them is gold'—and later on, 'The best things in life are free.' Well, free they may be, but they've got to be worked for, any road. Those were what you never worked for, Loo. You've been a good son to me—the best son i' the world—but I don't want to see you make any more mistakes, love."

He looked up. "Any more mistakes—it's not likely. I've made them all."

"Nay, there's always new ones cropping up, if so be as you're fool enough to make 'em. Will you 'ave to live in Liverpool, Loo? Funny to think that your Dad came from there, isn't it? Where will you live, dear?"

"A year ago I should have said—in a suite at the Adelphi; now—I don't know. Rooms—a room. I'll come and see you whenever I can."

"But—" his mother hesitated—"but—Alicia? What's she doing?"

For a second he longed to tell her everything, to explain how Alicia came to be with him, and the realization that had come to him concerning her. Habit was too strong; he had learnt to keep his own council, not to confide in even his mother. For years he had contrived to live his life without sharing his troubles with anyone, and the barrier which he had built up was too strong to be torn down immediately. He shrugged his shoulders, keeping his face unmoved.

"She's in Austria—quite a comfortable place. Incidentally"—his tone was expressionless; he might have been telling her of some unimportant piece of news—"I didn't want her to travel—at the moment, for obvious reasons."

"A baby!" Jane's astonishment was unconcealed. "Alicia's going to 'ave a baby? When, Loo, when?"

Louis did not reply; he could hear Alicia saying, ". . . in five months". Heard her so clearly that he could have sworn that she was in the room with them. He felt shaken, disturbed; knew that a great wave of nostalgia

swept over him, making him long to leave England and return to her.

He must be careful. Women were wise about these things; they knew so much concerning babies, dates, conditions. He repeated his mother's question to gain time.

"When?" he said. "When? Oh, in—seven months, I believe. Yes, about seven months."

"Why, then I'm sure a train journey needn't have 'urt 'er! Coddling never 'elped matters, Loo, I can tell you that. You're never going to let 'er 'ave it out there, among a lot of foreigners! Nay, send for 'er to come back. There's room enough 'ere; I'd look after 'er, I promise you. Nothing 'ud be too much trouble for a baby of yours, my dear, you know that. Think of it—well, I never did."

The pallor of his face startled her; every vestige of colour had drained from it; even his lips looked white, she thought. His hands were clenched, his whole figure seemed tense, rigid.

"Loo—what's wrong?"

"Nothing—nothing at all. I think if you don't mind we won't discuss this prospective child, or—Alicia. The whole thing must seem inexplicable to you. Only believe that"—he stopped, then took a deep breath, as if he prepared to plunge into deep water—"I love my wife very deeply and sincerely."

"Then," Jane said, speaking slowly, and giving each word its proper weight and due importance—"then if you love 'er deeply and sincerely—that's all that matters, Loo. *All that matters.*"

Louis came to where she sat, and, stooping, took her hands in his, holding them tightly, as if he found comfort in the contact of her wrinkled skin against his own.

"Thank you, Jane," he said softly.

CHAPTER THREE

I

LIVERPOOL WAS GREY DRAB AND GLOOMY. IF THERE were bright streets, theatres, concert halls and fine shops, they were unknown to Louis Silver for the first month of his existence in that city. He spent his time between the warehouse and the room where he lodged. He saved every penny, worked harder than he had ever worked in his life. From early morning, when he swung open the doors, until late at night, when he closed them and slipped the keys into his pocket, he worked, planned and organized.

Albert Lawson, a sad-looking little Jew with large dark eyes, said in his soft, almost effeminate voice, "No need to work so hard, Silver, tomorrow is also a day."

Louis nodded. "Possibly, but fruit doesn't keep for that extra twenty-four hours."

For the first month he found the work intolerable. His feet ached, he felt that he would never get the reek of fruit and vegetables out of his nostrils. His hands always reeked of oranges, and once again he knew what it was to find them plastered with dirt and decayed fruit. The place itself was good enough ; it was large, with room for expansion, but there was no organization ; the clerk was young and inexperienced, the carters unused to the kind of discipline which Louis Silver imposed.

His eyes were everywhere ; the porters swore that in the morning he counted the number of oranges in every crate, and recounted them at night. Once when he found a porter eating an orange he threatened to dismiss him on the spot.

"If there is any pinching to be done," Silver said, "I do it myself."

The man stared at him insolently. "And do you?"

"If I do, I'm not fool enough to let you see me doing it."

Lawson said, "They're none of them overpaid, Silver. Got kids at home. Why not give them each a bag of oranges apiece when they stop work on a Saturday?"

Louis frowned. "But—why?" he asked. "They're paid *decent* wages, anyhow. Why *give* them anything?"

Lawson shrugged his narrow shoulders, spread his hands and said, "Why—not? Makes 'em feel good—men like to take something home for their kids on Saturday."

"As you like," Louis told him. "But the principle is wrong. You give them if you wish—I won't. Kindness and business don't work in a commercial concern. Justice—well and good, but kindness is a sort of sentimental overweight. I'm opposed to—overweight in anything."

None of the staff liked him much, but he could and did get work out of them. He had a trick of galvanizing them into putting every ounce of energy into whatever they attempted. He rarely praised, and when he blamed his tongue was bitter. His temper was uncertain, and more than one huge porter quailed when Silver spat out his oaths and biting comments on work which was not executed to his liking.

Lawson, neat and unobtrusive, visited shops and hotels seeking orders. Whenever he returned he knew that Silver listened with a certain contempt to his reports, and felt that Silver could have done better. Once he suggested that Louis should take the work over.

"And leave the warehouse to you?" Louis queried.

"Well—I just thought——"

"You're wrong, Lawson, that's just what you didn't do. Let me get this place running properly and I'll make time to do your rounds for you. You don't push

sufficiently. What's the use of being a Jew if you don't get yourself disliked?"

"I begin to think," Lawson said gently, "that we Jews have played that game of getting ourselves disliked—just a little too long."

"Why the hell should any of us—Jews or not—care whether we're disliked or otherwise?"

"Don't you—care?"

"Not a damn, believe me! I want work done; I see that it gets done. I want orders to come in; very well—I go after them and get them. I don't want loving-kindness from my fellow men, I want their belief that I can supply them with what they want—and their money for doing it. That's my creed."

Albert Lawson chuckled softly. "You really think that's a true summing-up of your ideas? No, no, Silver. If it were you'd not know it. That's a superimposed creed—not a fundamental one."

"It's the one I've held all my life—with"—he grinned unpleasantly—"with one notable lapse from grace."

He congratulated himself that he had reverted entirely to the old and successful Louis Silver. He had done with being sentimental, finished with dreams and hopes for the future. Alone in his room, tired and aching from the long day's work, he knew that again and again his mind turned to Alicia; knew that, in imagination, he travelled back along the road to Innsbruck. His tired body allowed his imagination full play, and he would picture the square, with its station, its rows of taxi-cabs; he would see the big hotel with its swing door so clearly that not a detail was missing. He saw the little inn, with its elaborate fresco, its neat curtains and its warm, rather stuffy dining-room. Consciously he made his pictures, always reserving the actors until the little stage was complete. Then—the door of the dining-room would swing open, and Alicia entered. He always knew when the door would open, always knew what she would say,

how she would look at him, holding out her hands, saying, "Louis, you're back!"

That was the dream; then came the nightmare, when he realized that time had not stood still, that she was changed, looking as he had dreaded to see her. The knowledge came as a haunting terror, and he would grip the arms of his chair and feel the sweat stand out on his forehead. All his old anger against Bendish was hot, and with it came a smouldering resentment against Alicia herself that she should have brought this suffering to tear him. Later, as both anger and resentment faded, came a contempt for himself that he should allow these things to affect him.

He despised his own weakness; having set his hand to the plough, he should have been sufficiently strong to protect himself. Alicia should have remained what she always had been—a woman whom he married for her looks, her position, her ability to play hostess. He should never have allowed himself to grow sentimental over her. The fault was his. So long as he had been strong, single-minded, fighting, battering his way through the ranks of other men less forceful than himself, he had been successful.

So he swung backward and forward, longing to dream of her, resenting those dreams when, vivid and strong, they came to him; loving her and yet seeking for reasons as to why he might shift the blame of his own misery and place it on her shoulders. He was conscious of his absorbing affection, he admitted his passion and his desire, and yet there were moments when he hated her for the pain which he suffered.

She had written to him, a letter which he felt had taken her much time and thought, a letter from which every reference to their last conversations had been eliminated, and which remained—even then—too kind, too affectionate, not to disturb him. He had read it again and again, trying to discover some hint that she

wanted him to come to her, or send for her ; taking each sentence, and trying to read into the words some deeper meaning than that which was apparent. Never had Alicia written such a letter to him. During their married life, such communications as she had sent to him had been the barest of notes, beginning, "My Dear Louis," stating a few brief facts, making requests and ending, "Yours affectionately, Alicia." His letters to her had been dictated to and typed by Barnard—bald, businesslike things they had been, utterly impersonal and more than a little formal.

Reading her letter for the twentieth time, the words "Kind and gentle" came to him again, and again he wondered how it had become possible for those two words to be descriptive of Alicia. He delayed answering it, until one evening when he was utterly wretched and despondent. He had been through a long, hard day, a day when everything had gone wrong, when deliveries had been late, orders had not come in and perishable fruit had defied every effort to keep it in good condition. Coming home, making his way through the slushy streets, he had hated the evidences of poverty which he saw around him. He had seen pinched faces, thin clothes and broken boots, and felt sudden resentment against present conditions. He had cursed himself for a fool for caring. What did it matter to him if people were cold, poor or even hungry? It was probably due to their own fault. They were, no doubt, improvident and lazy. He, at all events, was earning money. The weekly books showed a steady rise in the profits, and even Lawson, with his soft, almost apologetic method of going after orders, had bagged some excellent business recently. Lawson and Silver—for Cohen had kept his name out of the venture—were prospering.

As he passed the entrance to the Adelphi Hotel he locked up and laughed softly. He'd have that suite of rooms there before he'd finished! His own room, a

bed-sitting-room of the most obvious type, seemed to take all the heart out of him. How he loathed it, with its worn carpet, the blatant iron and brass lacquer bedstead with a marcella quilt, white once, but now dingy with the smoke of Liverpool ! The sulky little fire, for he had refused to tolerate a gas stove, and the armchair with its sagging seat, offered but very little comfort to a tired man.

He sat down and began to re-read Alicia's letter.

. . . And the snows are going very quickly. High up there is still enough for the sun to touch in the early morning, making it turn rose colour. . . . Your little cat has adopted me. . . . Francis is busy with his painting . . . perhaps never a great artist, but something very pleasant comes through his work . . . it gains in strength, I think. He talks of you very often and his admiration is unbounded . . . calls you "a just man".

Why the devil did she put that in inverted commas ? A quotation from some book or other, perhaps just a quotation from Verney ! More about himself, a frank and rather beautiful reference to what he had done—what he had done ! Again that dreadful longing swept over him. He sat there, staring at her letter, wondering how much, compared with the desire to see Alicia, the business at the warehouse mattered to him. He could bear anything except being separated from her.

Could he ? He argued with himself. Could he face going back, living with her, seeing her every day ? It was the first week in March now. He shivered. What was the good of pretending ? Why couldn't he admit, even to himself, that to go back—at present—was impossible ? What did her letter mean, anyway ? What had she ever said to make him imagine that she loved him ? What guarantees had he that once this child was born she would not find another lover, or, what might be almost worse, would she remain with him from

a sense of duty, a wish to repay him for what he had done? Hideous! Unthinkable.

Meanwhile he was allowing her to obsess him, to fill his thoughts, rob him of sleep and rest—and he was fighting to make a success. She was a brake on his activities; she was making him moody, coming between him and his work, unsettling him.

He answered her letter that night.

"Dear Alicia . . ." He wrote that he was intensely busy, absorbed in his work, determined to make a success, "which there seems every prospect of my doing, in time". Profits were still relatively small, and he was forced to live very carefully, as would be necessary for a long time. He had never felt better able to cope with work, "even with the slight set-back of the pneumonia, I feel the better for my holiday in Tirol". He paused, then added, "Probably my last holiday for years". He ended his letter, "Yours, Louis Silver."

Then, taking up Alicia's letter, he tore it neatly into strips and dropped them one by one into the fire.

II

When April came he had conquered his dreams. Whenever they threatened to overcome him he fought them back, resolutely turning his mind to other things—working at cost sheets, prices, making plans and answering inquiries. He bought a typewriter, and did most of the firm's correspondence at home, after work for the day was finished. The tapping of the keys seemed to drive away all thoughts of those things he loved. Loved—when the word came to him he refused to admit it. Had loved—or, better still, had imagined that he loved.

Verney wrote every week, long, scrawled letters, stating that "Mrs. Silver is well. Apparently the doctor is very satisfied with her." Louis read them, answered

them briefly on the firm's headed paper, then destroyed them. He had sent Verney money; he had done his duty as he had promised.

It was little Albert Lawson who upset all his careful calculations. Louis suspected that, in spite of the financial success which he had made, Lawson was a sentimentalist. He didn't have those dark, liquid-looking eyes for nothing. His mouth was too full, and his voice too soft.

"What do you do with yourself in the evenings?" he asked Louis one foggy afternoon, as they sat in the office drinking strong tea out of thick cups, with saucers that didn't match.

"Work—letters, costs, and so on."

"Always work, Silver?"

"What else is there to do?"

"Come and dine with me one night. I live alone, you know, and I live quite comfortably. I promise you a dinner which will be eatable."

"I'd like to. Thanks!"

"Tomorrow? Eight. Dress if you prefer it. I do—but if you don't want to—"

"That's all right." Nice to wear light, smooth cloth again. Last time he had worn tails—had felt excited—Damn it, this time had nothing in common with last time. This was merely a couple of men dining alone. Black ties, short jackets. Almost fiercely he concentrated his thoughts on Lawson. Queer little man, living alone, dressing for dinner—different from Cphen and his Becky!

Lawson proved to live in a big, old-fashioned house, in what had at one time been a district filled with good suburban houses, but where the town had encroached year by year until it was in suburbia no longer. An elderly man in a black short coat and striped trousers opened the door. Louis found himself in a large square hall, which reminded him vaguely of the hall at Carrick.

It was smaller, of course, but furnished in much the same style. There were rich rugs on the polished floor, old oak, heavy and gleaming with much polishing. His hat and coat were taken from him deftly. He followed the man into a room on the right of the hall.

Astonishing! Louis Silver knew nothing of styles, and cared less, but he realized that this was a room which held valuable and rare things. He knew, too, that the carpet was admirable, the furniture of some period which he judged to be good. There was china, silver, a great chandelier of cut glass, and a few—very few—pictures.

Lawson entered, looking more at home than he ever did at the warehouse, sounding less submissive and more certain of himself. Louis fingered the glass which held his cocktail and said, "That looks like very nice glass to me, Lawson."

"It's not old." There was a hint of apology in the voice. "I had it made for me when I was in Venice two years ago—was it two years ago, Saul?"

"Yessir, two years ago."

Louis said, "You go in for old stuff, then?"

"No, no—or, at least, not primarily because it is old. I've never made a fetish of believing that anything over a hundred and fifty years is automatically beautiful! I detest that kind of affectation."

"Beautiful—I don't know anything about beauty. I only know that age seems to add to the value of most things—" he laughed—"barring fruit."

They dined, and dined well. Louis had not eaten such a meal for months. He enjoyed the admirable food, the shining crystal, fine china and excellent wine. Lawson ate sparingly but with appreciation.

"I don't eat a great deal," he said, "but I like to have something worth eating. The result of living on rankly unpalatable food for years. During my early years—the impressionable ones. I acquired a hatred for coarse food then—it stands me in good stead now."

He talked well, speaking in his low, round voice, using his hands to gesticulate in a manner which proclaimed his race, even relapsing into unusual inflections, and using phrases which were unfamiliar. Louis knew that his attention was held, that he was consciously enjoying himself. The atmosphere of the place was soothing; nothing jarred. He felt relief at having escaped—even for a brief hour or two—from his dingy bed-sitting-room. Again he listened to a man talking of beauty, speaking as if this strange thing were a necessary adjunct to life and mental well-being. Listening, Louis drummed his finger-tips impatiently on the arm of his chair, unconscious that the sound could reach his host. Lawson glanced at him sharply.

"My ideas seem impossible and slightly ridiculous?" he asked, smiling a little.

"No, but this—beauty. What is it? How can you find it? I know that this is pleasant to look at, the other is unpleasant, but—" his voice sharpened—"how do I find these things? I've had no time to visit picture galleries, precious little time to read poetry, and certainly none to learn what painters mean."

Lawson laughed softly; there was no hint of superiority in the sound; it was tolerant and kindly. His dark eyes shone with interest; he leaned forward, suddenly eager.

"I can't explain," he said, "because I had scarcely any education. I began work when I was eleven; selling oranges at the stage door for my father. You don't—can't—learn what beauty is from books—or by merely looking at pictures. I don't believe it matters—or scarcely matters—whether you know what a painter means or not. Pictures aren't like novels; they don't set out to 'tell stories'. If they do—well . . ." He shrugged his shoulders, and spread his hands palm upwards in protest. "I've met men who could talk to me for an hour of the composition of a picture, who had the history of the painter at their finger-tips, who knew the date of the picture, how

long it took to paint, and the ingredients used in the making of the paints. There was never a hint that any beauty had reached them. To realize beauty—in anything—don't you think that there must be something in oneself first?"

He leaned forward, his bright, soft eyes fixed on Louis. He looked excited and interested, as if he really cared what his guest answered. Strange how people who believed in this pursuit of—beauty—became thrilled over it, liked to discuss it.

Louis shook his head. "How do I know? I've never found it."

"Yes, yes, I think that I'm right. Otherwise—if the mind, the—the soul is not prepared, beauty falls like seeds on hard, unprepared ground. Pictures are paint and canvas; trees, hills, rivers, lakes are merely—scenery; music—a series of notes arranged in a certain order. But—if your mind is in tune—that's right, if it's *in tune*, prepared—shall we say dug over and watered?—then something rushes out of you, and makes you cognizant of the beauty in whatever you see or hear. 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder'—it's true, only those eyes must be mental or spiritual eyes. Not material ones."

Louis frowned. "Do you mean, then, that if I am not in a proper frame of mind—"

Lawson nodded. "Something like that. Without a kind of state of spiritual grace a yellow primrose remains—a yellow primrose. Value—yes, you may know the value of a picture to the exact penny, but you're not getting anything out of it—for yourself. I know that it's just a little embarrassing to have anyone quote poetry, particularly as I don't speak it well, but what most of us want is a little Celestial Surgery."

Raising his eyebrows, Louis queried, "Religion? Is that what you mean?"

"Of a kind—but undenominational. Strictly undenominational! It's from something Louis Stevenson

once wrote." He laughed again, obviously excusing himself, and then began to speak slowly and carefully, as if he knew the words so well that he feared custom might have made him rob some of them of their full value. Louis listened intently, forgetting to criticize, omitting to notice that here and there Lawson stumbled over a word, or stressed a phrase incorrectly.

The low voice went on :

" . . . if morning skies,
Books and my food and summer rain
Knocked on my sullen heart in vain :
. . . most pointed pleasure take
And stab my spirit broad awake,
. . . before that spirit die,
A piercing pain, a killing sin,
And to my dead heart run them in!"

He said, with a hint of apology in his voice, "I didn't say that very well, but—you see what I'm driving at, don't you?"

"'Stab my spirit broad awake,'" Louis repeated. "Then you think that one's spirit ought to be—broad awake?"

"If it's to be alive, vital, ready to be cognizant of what is going on round about it, if it's to appreciate, assimilate—yes!"

"I see——". Louis rose. "I must be getting on. I wonder if you'd lend me the book that has that poem in it? It's a new idea to me. Not a particularly palatable one. I dislike facing the fact that I haven't made the best use of my opportunities." His voice had gone back to its old tone of slight contempt. Already he was asking himself what on earth he, Louis Silver, wanted with poetry books, what beauty and the pursuit of it mattered to him. Yet he waited until Lawson searched on a shelf and returned with a small book, bound in shabby blue cloth.

"It's not all poetry—there's a good deal of prose ; but it's all very simple and direct. Keep it, if you like ; I have another copy."

Louis Silver walked home down the wide road where the late trams thundered past him, where the electric standards flung broad dark shadows, to the centre of the town and thence on to the shabby street where he lived. Here the lights were less brilliant, the road less wide. Reaching his own door, he fumbled with his key, and something rubbed against his legs. He looked down, and saw a small black-and-white cat, friendly, and rejoicing in human companionship. He stooped to stroke it, but with a flirt of its tail it was off, scampering along in the shadow of the houses. Louis watched it go, shrugged his shoulders, smiling and saying softly, "Very well, my dear—I'm not going to follow you !"

He felt soothed and more contented than he had done for weeks. As he mounted the stairs, with their worn carpet, and here and there a stair-rod which had worked loose, he let his thoughts run on unchecked. If he had followed the little cat—where would she have led him ? Was it even a real cat, or a figment of his imagination ? Away in Austria, among the mountains and the snow and the brilliant blue sky, there was just such another little furry beast, which had coiled itself round his legs in exactly the same way. Did his little black-and-white cat ever miss him, wonder what had happened to the man who used to scratch gently behind her ears until she sang with pleasure ?

Did anyone miss him ? Verney—or Alicia ?

In his room he sat down and pulled out the little book which Lawson had given him. Turning its pages, he resisted the temptation to read lines of prose, and resolutely sought for the "Celestial Surgeon".

"Books and my food and summer rain"— He'd never had much time to read ; food—he didn't see what food had to do with beauty, somehow ; and summer rain—

well, he'd always regarded rain as a tedious necessity which ruined business. But that "piercing pain"—he felt that light was breaking through somewhere. He had known what pain meant when he left Alicia, left behind him all that he'd hoped and longed for. Could it be that this man, this Stevenson, believed that pain could be turned, as it were, to good account? Did he imagine that through suffering you might reach a better understanding and appreciation? Queer ideas these fellows had!

He let his eyes wander down the page, resting here and there when a sentence seemed to leap out towards him. "Purge out of every heart the lurking grudge. Give us grace and strength—" That was what a man wanted, strength! He could understand that. "Give us courage and gaiety and the quiet mind"—strength and courage. Courage to see things through, not to turn tail and run.

Prayers apparently; funny to think of Louis Silver sitting in a chilly bed-sitting-room reading—*prayers*. Yet he went on—"Blind us to the offences of our beloved, cleanse them from our memories, take them out of our mouths forever." Abruptly he closed the book and laid it down on his writing-table. "The offences of our beloved—" The words rang in his ears. Not sufficient merely to forgive, but we must be blind, we must cleanse them from our memories, take them out of our mouths.

He untied his tie, his mouth twisted a little, his eyes hard.

'It's easy to talk,' he mused; 'had he been through it all—he might not have found phrase-making so easy.'

He could not sleep. Again and again his mind went back to that injunction written by a man of whom, until that evening, Louis Silver had scarcely heard. Forgiveness, being blind to faults, having the ability to expunge facts from your mind—these things made no especial appeal to him. He loved justice, and believed that what

you bought you must pay for. As he lay there, his hands clasped behind his head, his mind reverted to that justice in which he believed. Dimly in the recesses of his memory he found a lurking doubt. Had he been so just, had he not taken upon himself to censure, adopted an attitude which was a contradiction to what he really believed?

Alicia had left him. He had been willing that she should divorce him; he wanted to be free of responsibilities, free of—Alicia, a woman for whom, at that time, he had no particular liking or affection. She had left him for Bendish; had he ever imagined that they were living separate lives? Had he not decided months ago that Roger Bendish was not the man to deny himself anything for which he lusted? Certainly, knowing Bendish, realizing what his life had been previous to his meeting with Alicia, it didn't seem remotely possible. If people lived together, the natural outcome was—a child. If that were a sin, then the whole business had been sinful. He could not recall that he had ever regarded Alicia's intrigues as—sinful. Stupid, lacking in dignity, lacking in common sense perhaps—but sinful! Great heavens! What did he know about the rights and wrongs of these affairs? Society didn't condemn divorce; the law didn't condemn it, provided you observed the rules of the legal game, and the Church—well, what had he to do with the Church? If she'd loved Bendish—he moved impatiently—hell, why add that "if"?—only to make it easier for himself. Of course she had loved Bendish! As—equally of course—he, Louis, now loved her! If men and women loved each other, nothing could keep them apart. How much sin was there in it? Nature made them as they were. It was all very well to talk about control, self-respect and half a dozen other things, but nature won in the end. Sin—it all depended upon from which angle you viewed it. Louis Silver, at all events, couldn't begin to be hypersensitive, super-critical and censorious.

She'd come to him, asked him to take her back as his wife. You could call that action many things—but assuredly not a sin. Impertinence, selfishness, over-confidence, assuming too much—that was as far as you could go. She'd nursed him—he remembered her cool hands, and smiled at the thought that she'd not been terribly efficient ; she'd faced his sneers, ill-tempers, faced them calmly and without resentment. Courage—he liked courage.

He sighed ; he was tired to death. The morning must find him at the warehouse very early. There was a huge consignment of tomatoes coming in—nasty pallid foreign stuff, hard as bricks and with about as much taste !

"No need to blind myself to your offences, my dear," he said softly. "I've taken out the whole lot of mistakes, examined them, and they don't amount to so much. Even if they did, they're no affair of mine. What affects me is—the future. I can forget everything, if through you I can find—what were the words ?—grace and strength."

CHAPTER FOUR

1

HE HAD NEVER BEEN IMPULSIVE, AND NOW, WITH THIS realization of his love for Alicia, the sudden crystallization of his emotions after dining with Lawson, he knew that he had become lacking in confidence where she was concerned. More than once he tried to convince himself that he was merely being cautious, that he distrusted his own feelings and the conclusions to which he had come at a time when he had been over-tired and yet mentally stimulated by what he had read.

Again and again he played the part of "Devil's Advocate" and attacked what he knew were his real hopes and desires. Again and again he assured himself that to return to Austria might mean a snub direct from the woman he loved. She had never told him that she cared for him. She had admitted that she liked him, liked him better than she had ever done, but that wasn't enough to warrant his suggestion that they might—begin again. Then there were complications, one of them Alicia's own father. Harry Waldon was attached to his daughter, Louis remembered, in the easy, irresponsible fashion of their class. He had known about Bendish; he had come to Innsbruck after Roger's accident. He obviously knew too much. He would need convincing, because these people had such queer ideas about property and inheritance.

As he thought, frowning, his chin on his hand, Louis would spring to his feet suddenly and pace the room, trying to see how and where he could straighten the tangle. Curiously enough, he had ceased to feel any particular animosity toward the dead Bendish. His feelings were

confined to moments of acute irritation. Bendish had been a fool, a muddler, and, what was most culpable in Silver's eyes, he had left other people to straighten out his muddles ! Again he flew back to his old term of condemnation—inefficient !

April slipped into May. Verney wrote that he had another commission for twenty-five paintings, and that his agent in London had been selling his sketches most successfully. Louis, reading the letter, thought, 'Agent ? I wonder what percentage Verney pays him ? As likely as not the agent's doing him all ends up.' Alicia was well, very well, and tranquil. Queer word to use—"tranquil" ! Then, with another brief reference to her, the letter closed, leaving Louis Silver staring at the sheet of thin paper, unseeing, yet with pictures shaping in his brain, so real, so actual, that he had to shut and open his eyes rapidly to dispel them. He rose, and a sense of physical sickness swept over him. Swaying slightly, his forehead damp with sweat, he stood, his hands resting on the edge of the table. Nothing mattered ; he knew that he must go back. His longing to see and talk to Alicia was too strong ; he was beaten. He would put things in train immediately and risk everything. She must come back with him. He would make a home for her. The firm was prospering. Little Albert Lawson opened his dark eyes at the monthly balance sheet. Cohen, coming from Meliborough, dined them both at the Adelphi and said, "What did I tell yer, Elbert ? Thilver is the man we needed, eh ?"

Albert, smiling gently, said, "I never doubted it."

Lawson had put Louis on to one or two investments ; they were nothing spectacular, but were useful and sound. He had begun to climb the ladder again ; nothing should stop him. He would get in touch with Hawkes very soon ; see if it were not possible to get his fingers into this printing business. Verney might be useful—one never knew. Louis Silver wasn't rich—nothing like it—but he was on the right road. If he had stuck to fruit before he

would never have failed. That was something he understood, something where he had solid ground under his feet. Only a fortnight ago he had said to Lawson that they ought to have a shop—"Retail stuff—smart—up-to-date. Must be distinctive—different from the usual run of fruit shops." Lawson had agreed. He had been galvanized into activity by Louis' machine-gun-like decisions. He had combed Liverpool for a suitable shop—and found it. It was the old Fosdick scheme over again, and Louis smiled. Again he'd have barrows, only—and the smile died—this time he'd not keep Lawson or anyone else in the dark. A warehouse, a shop—two or three shops in time—and barrows to shift fruit which was not likely to keep, or which fell below the quality Lawson and Silver demanded for their clients.

His plans were all made. He knew that he had sufficient energy and drive to carry them through. What disturbed him was the immediate future : his future and Alicia's. One thing at least was clear to him : his future and hers were indivisible.

That night he wrote to her, beginning the letter half a dozen times, writing a few lines, then angrily tearing the paper into little pieces. 'What's the matter with me?' he demanded of himself. 'I don't generally find it so damned difficult to get my ideas down on to paper. Yet this—I can't get it right—it's stilted, not what I want to say at all. It reads like an order for crates of oranges! What I want is—' He frowned, and mechanically his eyes wandered, to rest on the little book with the shabby cover which Lawson had given him. His face cleared, "What I want," he repeated, "is gentleness and—courage."

He took up his pen again ; the words came easily.

He wrote : *Alicia, my dear, I want you to believe, in spite of everything, that I love you. I have had time to consider everything, and only one fact emerges from the tangle into which we both—fell. I want to have you with me, I want to make a home for you—and the thing which you will inevitably lose best in all*

the world—your baby. I ran away, not because I didn't love you sufficiently, but because I loved you very dearly, and that love made me a coward. He paused. "Courage and gentleness—that's what I lacked so signally." Again he took up his pen and wrote more slowly: *I doubt if I shall ever be an entirely satisfactory husband; I shall do my best to be as different as possible from the man you married. I have missed everything in my life which was beautiful; I can't miss the most beautiful thing of all—the chance of happiness with you.*

He stared down at the small, legible script. 'Me—writing about beauty!' he thought, and felt amazed that he had used the word so easily. "Beautiful things—the most beautiful thing". Queer how it had come so easily.

He ended the letter: *Will you write and tell me if I may come and talk to you? I am busy—he smiled; that was the old Louis Silver asserting himself; well, let it stand!—but I will contrive to get away at once if you will let me come to you. Louis.*

Two days later he found himself talking frankly to Lawson as they sat over dinner. How he began Louis never knew; he scarcely realized what he said, only when his recital was over he knew that the effort of speaking had left him physically exhausted. Lawson pushed a decanter toward him saying, "Take some cognac. You need it."

"Thanks." Then Louis added quickly, "God knows why I told you all that! I'm afraid it was unpardonable."

"I don't think so, I am happy that you did. It has proved many things to me, chiefly your incorrect estimation of yourself. And"—a smile flickered round his sensitive lips—"it proves also that I was right in my estimation of you."

Louis said, "Nonsense! If I've made you think that, then I have told the whole story badly. I behaved abominably."

"Possibly—the Louis Silver which you had created;

the fundamental Louis Silver—well, I admire him. And you're prepared to go through with it—all? To assume responsibility for a child that is not yours?"

Silver, twirling his glass in his thin fingers, said, almost sulkily, "It's—her child. That *ought* to be enough. It's *going* to be enough!"

"And"—Lawson's voice was very soft; it held a tone which was almost caressing; he might have been a father speaking to his son—"And, Louis Silver, you can say—and mean it—*Solacht!*?"

The light came back to Louis' eyes. He spoke as Lawson had heard him so often. "If I knew what it meant—probably."

"Ah, I forgot that you're not a Jew. It means—I have forgiven."

"No!" Silver said harshly. "No! Because—I can't see what I have to forgive. She's got a hell of a lot to forgive me. Whatever has happened is cleansed from my memory, and taken out of my mouth for ever. That's out of the book you gave me, Lawson. Forgiveness—there's too much talk of forgiveness. If you knew enough, and I happen to know all this story, to know why Alicia turned to this fellow—God, he must have been a relief after me!—you would know how little right I have to talk of—for giving. What the hell have I to forgive? I've got precious little to pat myself on the back about. On the other hand, don't think that in a moment of sentimental regret I am going to abase myself before the world. I've said that Alicia forgave me—well, I stick to that; people can think what they like about me."

"I gathered that would be your attitude," Lawson said. "You're not going to leave us—split the firm, Silver?"

"Good Lord, no! Why should I? I've got to work—make bigger profits. I don't intend to be a poor man for the rest of my life. If things turn out as I hope . . . Alicia isn't cut out to be poor—"

Softly Lawson interpolated, "She might change——"

"Damn it," Louis retorted, "I don't want her to change! Now, about this second shop, Lawson. I've been thinking that we might do worse than find a place at New Brighton—and possibly Birkenhead. It's a mistake to have too many shops in one town. People who know they can have the choice of three 'L and S' shops end by going somewhere else. Keep the one we have—exclusive. People are as great snobs about fruit as they are about anything else. As I see it . . ."

He was immersed in his business. Lawson, listening and watching, found it difficult to believe that it was the same man who, half an hour before, had told his story so simply, and with such sincere emotion. A queer fellow, Louis Silver.

II

A week later he was in Melbrough. He had received no reply from Alicia; he had become restless and irritable, snarling at the employees, answering even his best customers curtly and briefly. Then had come a letter from David. Bennison's had been approached by a firm of hotel-keepers. They were willing to make an offer for Jane's block of flats. Jane refused to enter into any negotiations without her son, and could Louis come over.

Melbrough looked flourishing enough, Louis thought as he walked from the station. There was plenty of movement, fewer groups standing at the street corners, shops newly painted, stock well displayed. Always good signs of flourishing trade. He was early, and, turning, entered the door of the County Club. Some whim had made him retain his membership; chiefly, he remembered, because he felt that the members would dislike him to do so, and yet—particularly as the divorce had come to

nothing, and he had paid all his debts—they would not be in a position to ask him to resign.

The place was almost empty. One or two of the club servants recognized him, and he made his way into the smoke-room, wondering how on earth he could ever have tolerated the place. Gloomy hole, it was, stuffy, with a smoke-laden atmosphere. Without thinking, he picked up an illustrated weekly and sat down in a chair by the window. He watched the heavy traffic rolling past—lorries piled high with bales and merchandise; certainly the place seemed to be humming with business. If she cared to sell, he ought to get a good price for Jane's flats.

"Excuse me, have you finished with— Good God, it's Silver!"

Louis turned quickly. Sir Harry Waldon was standing at his elbow, his mouth open with astonishment, his hand still outstretched for the journal which he had wanted.

"Yes—just for an hour or two. How are you, Sir Harry?"

He had felt momentary anger that Waldon should have found him, but now, with his brain clear, his whole body filled with that energy which invariably possessed him when he had a business deal in prospect, he knew that he might welcome this opportunity. "Have a drink, will you?"

Waldon hesitated; the situation was unusual, and he disliked anything which was not strictly conventional. He threw a hurried glance round the room, a glance which Louis Silver caught and commented upon.

"I doubt," he said, "if anyone recognized me, except old Walters. New hall porter, new waiters—looks as if you'd been having trouble with the staff, eh?"

Waldon lowered himself into a big chair. "Umph, plenty of it. The last hall porter—Cummings—began to drink—shocking affair—actually insulted one of the

members. Most unpleasant—regrettable. The waiters—well, I fancy— But you don't want to talk about the club, do you?"

"Not in the least ; I always thought it a boring, gloomy hole."

"Suits me—I've known it for so long. I first joined—my father belonged, original member—in 1896—long time ago, eh? Long time ago—but—as you said—yes, quite." He puffed out his lips, then said, dropping his voice to a whisper, "So the divorce was—declared off?"

Louis nodded, his eyes alert. "Yes—she was very generous to me."

"Eh? Generous? Well—" Again he whispered hoarsely. "Did you know, I mean did you hear that Bendish was dead?"

"Yes, I heard. Alicia told me."

"Alicia told you!" His eyes goggled; Louis saw the veins stand out on his temples. "But—Alicia's in some potty village in Austria."

"So was I until quite a short time ago. Hasn't Alicia told you that we're—together again? Now, that was inconsiderate of her. Yes, we've been together for—for months. I'm hoping to get out there in a week or so. She may travel back with me. If—" he spoke very slowly—"if she's sufficiently well."

Waldon leaned back in his chair; his eyes roamed vaguely over the big room. Catching sight of a waiter, he snapped his fingers and said huskily, "What about that drink? What's yours, Silver?"

"Gin-and-It, thanks."

"Waiter—gin-and-It, and—a double brandy and split soda. And be quick about it."

He turned back to Louis, stared at his impassive face, then said, "I don't understand this at all. Something queer about it. I—I was in Innsbruck when—when Bendish died."

Louis nodded. "Yes, I remember that I saw you, with

old Bendish. I always stay at that hotel myself. Very good, didn't you think?"

"But—damn, Silver, Alicia was there with Bendish. She was—"

Speaking evenly, with a touch of amused tolerance in his voice, Louis said, "Sir Harry, don't you think we all made a good deal too much of that—that piece of—what shall I call it?—romantic stupidity? I was a tedious fellow. I didn't understand Alicia; she didn't want to understand me—and I don't blame her. Bendish wasn't the type of man who really appeals to her. It was a mistake—regrettable, but understandable. I think we might call that chapter definitely closed. So far as my wife and I are concerned, it is closed—has been for months."

"And now you say—if she's well enough to travel. What does that mean?" The elder man was almost truculent. He was puzzled, disturbed, and he disliked being either.

"Isn't it pretty obvious what it means?" Louis asked coolly. "I think so."

"When—when—" he stammered, coughed and went on—"when is it?"

"I think—I admit that I am not particularly well versed in these matters—about August—or late July."

Waldon's face was purple; he drank his brandy noisily, and stared at Louis with heavy, bloodshot eyes. "There's something damned queer about all this," he said. "Damned queer. Alicia was crazy about the poor feller, and he about her. Then you want me to believe that she comes back to you, hotfoot, when the unfortunate feller is scarcely cold in his grave. Now you tell me that she's going to have a child! D'you expect me to believe all that rigmarole, Silver?"

"I not only expect that you will believe it," Louis said softly, "but I demand that you believe it—implicitly, unless you want me to make myself damnably objectionable to you. I may never have met with your complete

approval as a son-in-law, but as your daughter's husband you'll believe what I tell you, what I've told everyone, and what she will corroborate when she sees you. I don't think that there is anything more to be said, do you?"

Waldon slumped heavily in his chair, his face overcast, lined with worry. Silver was too slick, he reflected, something cunning about the feller. Sitting there cool as a cucumber, telling his story, and "demanding" that it should be believed! All these confounded Jews were alike, clever as paint, always scheming for their own ends. What Silver's end was in this business was difficult to say, but Waldon was pretty certain that he meant to benefit himself. Sinister—that was what he was—damned sinister. Louis rose; Waldon watched him, under his puffy eyelids. Not a bad-looking feller, slim and well built; thin, tough; shoulders not sufficiently broad. Not a patch on poor young Bendish. Pity, that had been. Admittedly both he and Alicia flung their caps over windmills, but—if everything had been different, Bendish might have proved a pleasant son-in-law. No money, but now apparently neither had Silver. So it would have all ended square.

"I wish you a very good morning," Silver said,

"Here—just a minute," Sir Harry expostulated; "I don't think that you can go like this. Alicia's my only child—I'm deeply attached to her. I want to know the truth, what's going to happen; I can't be left in a fog in this fashion. Why did she never tell me that she was with you? That's what I can't get at—something fishy somewhere."

Smoothly, as if he were patiently explaining something to a person of inferior mentality, Louis said, "What Alicia has or has not explained is not my business. I tell you that she—forgave my lamentable lapse from strict morality—"

"That was cooked, and you know it. I remember our conversation—"

"How pleasant for you! My advice is that whatever you want to know you should ask your daughter to tell you. Only—" and his voice sharpened—"only I will not allow her to be either worried or annoyed. Again—good morning."

He turned and walked away, Waldon watching his tall, slim figure, with the narrow hips and neat, swift movements. Damn the man, with his "I will not allow"! Damned impertinence. He rang the bell at his elbow, and gave the order, "Another double brandy."

III

Louis was tired, but not physically, for long hours in the warehouse, scarcely allowing himself to sit down to snatch a hasty meal, had trained his body to withstand fatigue. He was only mentally tired, and felt a queer pain that he should have been forced to offer garbled explanations to the old baronet. Had he been the only person involved he might have enjoyed pulling wool over the other man's eyes. He was not the only person; there was Alicia, and it had filled him with a kind of sick pain that she should have been dragged into it. The pity of it all—when it might have been unsullied.

His eyes narrowed, his shoulders stiffened a little. 'I must never let myself think along those lines. The future is what we make it; the past—it's over, done with.. It can't touch what—will be. That's what I must catch hold of, grasp tightly.'

Jane was glad to see him, holding him at arm's length, repeating, "I do believe as you've filled out a bit, Lou—I do reely. Yes, you look better; that's a right bit of comfort, that is."

David arrived, with his neat bag filled with papers. He was stouter, his hair thinner, with something about him that made Louis feel irritable. David was so pleased

with life, himself, his wife and children. He'd every right to be, but he needn't ouze satisfaction, needn't adopt an attitude which was slightly patronizing.

He seated himself, rustled papers, snapped rubber bands, and finally looked up, saying, "Now—touching the matter of this proposed hotel—"

Jane said quickly, "Nay, that's for Loo to say. I know nothink about it, and care less. S'long as Loo thinks it right an' wise—that suits me. He always 'ad a good 'ead on 'is shoulders, 'ad Loo."

David looked patient, glanced at Louis and asked, "Very well then—?"

Louis disregarded the glance and, turning to his mother, asked, "Do you mind leaving here? If you don't like the idea—the whole deal is off."

He heard his brother rustle papers impatiently, and suddenly the amusing side of it all struck him. Here was David—Bennison's head clerk—growing impatient with Louis Silver. A year ago he would have listened to every word of his brother's as if it carried real weight and actual value. Now—because he was only Louis Silver of Lawson and Silver, and no longer Silver of Carrick—David believed that he had lost his intelligence at the same time as his money; apparently your intelligence was rated according to the amount of money you managed to earn, or grab or steal. Except, of course, when David Silver assessed his own mentality; then he would find a hundred reasons why he, with his probable £500 a year, was not paid according to his brain-power. Everyone always found good reason to account for themselves being exceptions.

Jane smiled. "That's just like Loo, isn't it? Nay, I like this flat; I never found a place as was 'andier; the cupboard space is wonderful; but lately the neighbours 'aven't been as nice as what they were once on a time. There's some tidy little villas being built out by Culmoor —up the road—about 'arf a mile; the trams run past.

Right tidy little 'ouses they are, with a bit o' garden, an' electric cookers, an' some say they'll put refriges in as well. I've rather a mind to take a young lady to lodge. Maybe a teacher—in one of the schools. Company, and give me someone to look after—"

"Yes, Mother, yes," David broke in, "but what about selling this place? Legally it's yours, you know, and the decision rests with you."

"Get away, don't be so silly," she retorted. "Don't I know as men who finds themselves in a bit of a—well, a difficulty, often makes property and suchlike over to their wives or mothers or someone? It's Loo's; 'e worked for it, and that's all there is to it. Only, Loo—I'd like one of those little 'ouses, if so be as it's possible."

He laughed, and she leaned forward and patted his hand. David's face was serious, even gloomy. Louis thought, 'Damn it, I feel years younger than David seems. He's getting ponderous!' To his mother he said, "All right, Jane, that's settled. You shall have your house, and take your young lady lodger—"

David said, "No need for that surely!"

"No need at all—except that Jane should do exactly as she likes—eh, Jane? Now, David, we'll get down to this business." He pulled up his chair, speaking briskly. He'd show David that Louis Silver could still drive a bargain, could still comprehend values and potential values. He'd even get in a clause that this hotel company bought their fruit from Lawson and Silver. They'd got enough places up and down England. Very well, they should agree to deal with his firm.

"The offer—tentatively—is made by the British and Continental Hotel Company—they're a flourishing concern, paying last year a dividend of twenty per cent. Twenty per cent—" David repeated, rolling the words out as if they tasted pleasant on his palate. "Their latest venture is—"

Louis said, "I know—the Grotian, at Bristol. Sir

Makepeace Henderson is the Chairman; he was Managing Director for Calver's when I took them over. Cut out the prospectus, David, let's get down to the facts."

The positions were suddenly reversed. David, instead of controlling the discussion, faded a little into the background, while Louis, alert and keen, dictated his terms crisply, giving his orders without faltering.

"And I make it a condition that they . . ." And he continued, never pausing for a word, while David, with a flying pencil, nodded from time to time, his eyes scarcely lifted from his note-book, or merely ejaculated, "Quite—yes" or, "I have that."

Later, when Louis got up, lit a cigarette and stood smoking, his eyes suddenly introspective and without their expression of hard alertness, he said softly, "Queer to think that this is the end of the original house. Poor Fosdick—he thought it the finest house in Mellborough."

"Clever chap, old Bert Fosdick—!"

"No," Louis said, "never a clever chap. Lucky; astute to a point, but too fantastic, too self-centred. Lacking in self-discipline."

His mind went back to the night Fosdick had died; the night when he had got two of his barrow-men to witness the will. A nasty business—ugly—and he twisted his lips as if he tasted something unpleasant. He hadn't done any great harm probably. Fosdick had no relations, and Louis Silver had certainly built up the business—but—no, it had been an ugly, underhand affair. He wished that he could have wiped it out, only it wasn't always possible to clean slates by wishing.

The money hadn't done him so much good either. He'd lost the lot. No, better face it—Louis Silver had been successful and tricky. He'd never stopped for a scruple; just gone straight ahead, and swept obstacles out of his path. If he made a clean breast of everything it wouldn't sound too pretty. Hard, cunning, taking chances and considering no one except

himself—that had been Louis Silver. It was no use saying that life had been hard, that he'd taken bad knocks—who didn't? He'd even ticketed himself "Jew" because he believed that men were ready to think the worst of the Hebrew, and certainly he had done nothing to make them alter that opinion. In his own small corner of the world he had made people think less well of a whole race. Now—for the first time—he wished that he had behaved differently; not for his own self-esteem, but so that he might have stood well with Alicia.

"If I tell her about Fosdick—about the barrows—the will—and the girl I dragged in to make it sound less savoury—what's going to happen? She'll stare at me, probably say very little, except, 'My de'ah Louis, this doesn't really interest me very much. Need you go on?' Well, I'll risk it—and trust that she'll love me sufficiently to be blind to my offences."

His brother's movement brought him back to the present. David was packing his papers away neatly; he looked up and said, "Then I'll get on with that?"

"Please—" The tone of employer to employee; then, more kindly, "Thanks for taking so much trouble, David."

"It's been a pleasure—" He paused, then with a certain effort went on, "How are things with you, Louis? I heard about the divorce. Seemed a queer business. Did your wife—"

"My wife was remarkably tolerant towards me. Things are going fairly well with me—with the firm. I've not made a fortune yet, but—the bank-book makes increasingly pleasant reading. Oh, what's happened to Carrick?"

"It's still on the market. No one wants those big houses now. The land's let for grazing."

Louis looked thoughtful. "It's good land, isn't it?"

"Supposed to be. I wonder no one's had the idea of making it into a big market garden—"

"A market garden!" The tone was sharp, almost startled. "A market garden—plenty of room. It's an idea, David."

"You're not thinking of taking Carrick, are you?"

The eyes had lost their expectancy; Louis' face was mask-like again. His voice came unconcerned and non-committal. "No-o-o. Only interested. You see, my wife has a kind of affection for the place. Still, that was only just idle speculation, the germ of an idea—you know how these things fire one's imagination. Well, good-bye, David, let me know what transpires. Don't bother Jane—business worries her."

CHAPTER FIVE

I

HE WAS BACK IN LIVERPOOL. HE HAD BEEN WITH Jane to inspect the house which she coveted ; he had told her that, whatever money the block of flats brought, not one penny was his.

"Do what you like with it, Jane. Spend it on yourself if you like—or make yourself a public benefactor and give it to the hospital. I won't touch it."

"Loo, I call you downright silly," she expostulated.

"Many people call me less agreeable names."

She squeezed his arm. "Funny lad you are. You've altered a lot, Loo."

"Have I? How?"

"I dunno. You was always a dear boy, but—nay, it's not a bit of use me trying to put a name to it, but I feel it—in my 'eart I feel it. To begin with—I believe you're 'appier, love."

"Perhaps more hopeful." He spoke slowly. "Yes, more hopeful."

"Well—no one's 'appy without 'ope, so with 'ope you must be 'appier."

He laughed softly. "Oh, wise Jane!"

In his dingy bed-sitting-room he found a letter from Alicia. He sat down with his elbows on the table and stared at the envelope, not attempting to touch it. His heart was hammering against his ribs, his eyeballs felt hot as if he had sand under the lids. He bent forward, scrutinizing the writing. Strange to think that

this envelope had come half over Europe to him ; to think that this letter—which held everything of the gravest import to him—had been jostled in mail-bags with circulars, picture postcards, vapid communications from people who were on holiday and wished to recount their doings to their friends at home. It had received no more attention than the rest, and yet here it lay—the most important letter he had ever received.

He took out a small penknife and slit the flap of the letter. Dimly he could remember that his father had said to him, "Never tear letters open. Cut them with a knife. You might tear a siver one day, ripping letters open carelessly." He had never forgotten, always had that possible "silver" in his mind.

He drew out the sheet of thin, pale-blue paper.

My dear,

You must come to me, but not yet. That was a beautiful letter ; you are far kinder than I deserve. I, too, have had time to think, to come to conclusions, and understanding of myself and you. I want to talk to you, to have you with me—be patient and I will send to you when I can see you. I love you too much to be able to allow you to face additional pain.

Alicia.

He read the letter twice, then stood weighing it in his hand, as if by doing so he could realize its full meaning. She would see him, she wanted to talk to him, and she began her letter "*My dear*". What did it mean ? Everything—or nothing. To talk—and say, what ? She had come to conclusions—what were they ? Her understanding—of what ? But she wrote : "*I love you*".

Through the succeeding days he asked himself those questions again and again ; they ran through his head when he tried to sleep ; his feet beat them out as he walked to the warehouse ; the noise of the trams battered

them again and again on to his brain. Questions—questions—and no answers. The weather was hot, the warehouse smelt heavily of over-ripe fruit, flies buzzed, and Louis felt that he was going crazy. The streets were dry and dusty ; the pavements felt hot to his tired feet ; his room remained stuffy despite all his attempts to introduce some fresh air. Again and again his mind turned to the mountains, to the clear, cool air, to the sound of rushing streams. He heard the songs of the peasants, fancied that he listened to the repeated "*Gruß Gott*", which were spoken as he passed. He imagined that he listened to the sound of the big saws in the timber-mill by the bridge ; he could hear the cries of the children as they called to each other, running down the street when school was over for the day. He could see grass starred with flowers, woods where the heavy shadows lay, or where the sun, piercing the shade, flung light in dappled patterns of gold among the pine needles.

Lawson watched him anxiously, noticed how thin his face had grown, saw the grey hairs which were showing at his temples, listened, too, for that old note of irritability in his voice when he gave orders.

"Silver, when are you taking your holiday?" he asked.

"Holiday? What holiday? I've not worked for twelve months yet!"

"I still think that you're due for a rest. I shall take mine in July. I'm going to the Dolomites—to get cool air, cool nights, and get the smell of fruit out of my nostrils."

He saw the light in Louis' eyes. "The Dolomites?" he said. "Mountains, eh? Yes, it would be pleasant."

"Why not go—now; come back refreshed to carry on when I'm away? Not"—with his small, nervous laugh—"that you don't carry the bulk of the weight now, but when I'm away you won't even have me to blame for not working sufficiently hard. That will rob you of one small pleasure."

"My dear chap, I'm not such an unreasonable brute, surely?"

"No, no. I was joking. But you'll go, Silver?"

Louis nodded. "Yes—I'll go—on Saturday. Two weeks?"

"Two weeks."

He felt that a burden had been lifted from his shoulders. He would not wait for Alicia's permission; he couldn't wait, the strain was unbearable. He would take the train, be carried over those mountains, find himself in Innsbruck, where the mountains looked down on the little town, where he would find tall, fair men and women, with blue eyes and kindly smiles. On, up the long, winding road, looking back on the town below, past rivers, past the old tollhouse, past the elaborate shrine, and—to Alicia. He was excited, conscious that he felt like a schoolboy going on holiday. His doubts had vanished; he was afraid no longer; nothing mattered except the future—the future which they would spend together. Lawson said: "I believe that you look younger since you decided to go off for a holiday."

Saturday came; his bags were packed; he had given notice to his landlady, because when he came back he must find a house for Alicia. He frowned, wishing that he had more money, that he might have taken Carrick for her, have furnished it as she would wish, spent money recklessly on her.

"Wait, only wait, my dear," he said softly. "You shall have everything." On the journey he grudged the moments when he slept, wishing to watch the landscape flying past, realizing fully that each moment brought him nearer. The scenery changed. He saw the mountains—robbed of their snow except in a few isolated cascas—towering up, touching, so it seemed, the brilliant blue of the sky. He sighed with content—he was coming nearer; he was going to see the realization of his dreams.

At Innsbruck he got out, filling his lungs with the

clear air. The sun shone fiercely, but the air still remained cool; wonderfully cool to Louis after the long, hot night. He walked out, carrying his bags, and stood in the big square outside the station. He looked round him, smiling a little. He was happy; no shadow remained. Here he had been angry, disappointed; here he had nursed his grudge against Roger Bendish, had prepared to sneer at Alicia for her love of the dead man. These things had gone; no bitterness remained, only—hope for what the future might, would and should hold for him. Jane had said: "No one's 'appy without 'ope, so with 'ope you must be 'appier."

He hailed a taxi, and gave the order: "*Albergo Gentian, Steinach.*"

He sat back, leaning against the padded covers, and knew that he was shaking. Slowly his control returned, and he sat forward, hands on knees, his eyes eager and alert. Here was the road he knew—there another road branched off to some higher mountain village—Matrei, with its rushing water and painted houses, woods running down almost to the road itself. The old toll-house and the level crossing; the shrine with its tall, painted wooden figures, the bridge and the long, hilly street.

He was back! He said to the driver: "*Albergo Gentian—bitte.*"

The man flung back over his shoulder: "*Ja, ja!*"

The car drew up to the kerb. Louis wrestled with the handle of the door, cursed under his breath, wondering why all continental taxicabs had handles which resisted every attempt to turn them. Suddenly the door swung open and he was almost flung on to the pavement. His annoyance vanished; he laughed. This was how he arrived, then—coming on an errand which was the most romantic thing of his life, and landing practically on all fours in front of the hotel.

He flung the driver his fare, over-paying him extra-

gantly. It didn't matter—he was wildly happy. He could have scattered every penny he had in his pockets. He turned, to find Verney running out of the hotel to meet him.

"Hello, Verney! The unexpected return of the wanderer, eh?"

Verney's hair looked more unruly than ever, the lock about which Alicia had teased him hung lank over his forehead. He held Louis' hand, then said: "Yes—unexpected. Though I knew that you'd come."

Louis felt his face flush. What a fool he must look, standing there, grinning and laughing! Well, what of it? Verney had seen him scowl often enough. Nice change for everyone to see him laughing! He said: "Oh, you did, did you? Clever fellow you are, Verney."

"You didn't—I mean when did you leave England?"

"Yesterday—Saturday afternoon, four-thirty"

Then, growing impatient, he took Verney's arm and turned to enter the hotel. Trying to speak lightly, he asked: "How's Alicia?"

He heard Verney draw a long, shuddering breath; felt his arm jerk suddenly as if, like a frightened horse, he attempted to shy from Louis' grasp. He glanced at Verney, a quick, questioning look, and saw that his face was drained of all colour. Louis' fingers tightened, his heart began to drum heavily. From some distant place he felt that fear was riding towards him, fear that had no definite shape, and for that reason was the more hideous.

"How's Alicia?"

Verney licked his lips, stared with the terrified eyes of a trapped hare.

He said, "She's dead. She—she died last night."

Louis heard his own voice saying, "Last night—she died last night." Then he added, speaking urgently, "You mean what you say, don't you? You're not trying

to tell me that—she's left here or something, are you? You mean actually—dead, do you?"

Verney nodded, his pale-blue eyes swimming with tears.

II

They went into the little dining-room; Louis remembered how he had wanted the windows opened, and the waitress had firmly refused to allow him to have his own way. The windows were open now, and bright flowers bloomed in the window-boxes. The big porcelain stove was cold, but through force of habit they sat near it, as they had done in the winter.

Louis sat with his legs crossed, his face impassive, while Verney, leaning forward, speaking softly, and sometimes losing control of his voice, recounted the happenings of the last few days. Only when he stumbled, when his voice thickened, or when he brushed his eyes with the back of his hand, did Louis Silver's expression change in its expression. At those times a frown dragged his eyebrows closer, his mouth tightened and his whole body became taut with impatience.

Verney's words reached him as if spoken from a distance, and he was forced to listen with desperate attention in order to catch the sentences and realize their full import. Again and again he felt that if he allowed himself to relax for a second he would lose the thread of the whole story, and it was necessary that he should hear every minute detail. At certain points in Verney's story Louis knew that a wave of desolation swept over him, a wave so immense that it threatened to submerge him. It was like facing death, he thought. Only by a tremendous effort of will could he fight those oncoming waves and drive them back, so that once again he might hear Verney's stumbling voice, which had been drowned by the roar and tumult of that rushing water. Once he

had heard the whole story he could let go ; they might work their will on him, but until he was in full possession of the facts he must hold on and stand fast.

" . . . wrote to you last week," Verney was saying. She told me. She said, "I have written to Louis. I want him to come back to me—not yet, but very soon. It's not fair to ask him to come—yet. He's borne enough." You see, she was so afraid that you'd be—well, I mean that you couldn't face her being ill—when the baby—I think that was—"

Louis said harshly, "Yes—go on."

"She was really very well. She was—tranquil. Yes, that's the word. She took great care, walked quite a lot, went to bed early, never took any risks. The doctor told me that she had been a model patient ; he said—"

"Never mind what he said—go on."

"I'm telling you all that," Verney said patiently, "to show you that no one is to blame. That's all. Then—four days—yes, four days ago, she didn't feel awfully well. Not ill, you know—but—well, not quite so well as she had been." He stopped, pulled out a crumpled handkerchief and rubbed his eyes, saying as if in apology, "I was so desperately fond of her—it's dreadful. I didn't mean to— Sorry, Mr. Silver. No, she wasn't so well. She said, 'I think we'll send for the *Tirrolean Giant*'—that was what she always called the doctor. Oh, you remember him, of course, don't you ?"

Louis nodded. "I remember."

"He came, saw her and told me that he was disturbed. He didn't say why ; just frowned and said that he was going to get a nurse in from Innsbruck. She came, and later they sent for a doctor to come from Innsbruck as well. They both stayed all night, then the Innsbruck man went away and came back in the afternoon, and didn't leave again. I mean he stayed until—"

"I know what you mean," Louis Silver said.

Again Verney twisted his handkerchief, again that sound came as if he were choking. Louis moved impatiently, tapping with his finger-tips on the arm of his chair. Verney, still catching his breath, apologized and continued, speaking in little jerky sentences :

"By then—the baby was dead. I don't think it was ever alive. There were some complications. I stayed near the bedroom door, on the landing. I could hear them moving about all the time. Once they sent me for some ice. Then last night, about seven, they told me that there was no hope. No hope at all. I had telegraphed to you at about eleven in the morning. To Liverpool. I expect that you had left for London before the telegram got there. They let me go into her room." He shuddered and crouched lower in his chair, as if a sudden blast of cold air had struck him. "She was only partly conscious. I don't think in any pain. I asked that. They said that she wasn't suffering. I stayed about half an hour. She died at ten minutes past eight."

For the first time Louis abandoned his strained, rigid attitude. He leaned forward and caught Verney's wrist, holding it tightly in his fingers.

"Did she say anything?" he asked. "Anything—anything, mind. Don't make things up. Don't try to imagine what she meant. Tell me exactly what she—said. Never mind if it is palatable or not. Tell me!"

Verney met his eyes, his own swimming with tears, his sensitive mouth quivering. Twice Louis thought that he was going to speak, but each time he seemed incapable of saying the words which obviously rose to his lips.

"Tell me," Louis repeated; "for God's sake—tell me."

"Once—once"—he was trying desperately to regain his control—"she said, 'Give me your hands', and then—just at the end—about eight o'clock, she said, quite clearly,

'You wear tails better than most men, don't you?' That was all—after that she only—"

"I see," Silver said, "thank you."

Then the waves swept forward again. They caught him; he could no longer escape them; he was submerged, enveloped in darkness, a darkness filled with the sound of rushing waters, cold, unfriendly, cruel. For a moment a sense of exaltation possessed Louis. This was death. He was dying. There was some justice among all this mess and muddle. God was kinder than he had believed. But slowly the waves receded, and he felt the cold rim of a glass against his lips, and heard Verney saying, "Drink this, Mr. Silver—try to drink it, please."

He opened his eyes; he was still sitting near the cold stove in the dining-room; nothing was changed. Death, having taken Alicia, was apparently satisfied; he did not want Louis Silver.

"I'm all right," Louis said; "I ought to have known that it was too good to be true. Thanks, Verney, I don't want any more. Take it away."

Verney stood beside him, hesitating a little, then said, "Will you come and see her?"

"See her?" Louis queried. He paused. Did he want to see Alicia, dead, her face drawn and pinched, bearing, perhaps, marks of pain, perhaps made—through suffering—unlike the Alicia he had known; decked out in some awful trappings which were reserved for the dead, in a room stripped of every personal touch, made into a small, chilly mortuary? "No," he said, "I don't want to see her."

"The funeral is—can be if you wish—tomorrow. We waited to have your instructions. The hotel people have been very kind; usually they don't allow anyone to remain in the hotel—when they have died. But they were very fond of her. They called her—"

The funeral. That thought galvanized Louis into life again. Alicia was dead, but her father and his friend, old

Bendish, were alive. Alicia's father, who had said that he didn't credit Silver's story. Her father, who—with too much of his own excellent port inside him—might wag his head, and mumble to old Bendish what he thought, what he didn't think. He was most certainly not going to allow Alicia's father to have any doubts, to formulate theories and retail them later as facts to the listening county. Speaking crisply and clearly, Louis began to give orders. For the last time he'd stand by Alicia, make her father and his friends believe what he told them.

"Send off a telegram immediately. Give me some forms. I have a pencil."

He sat down at the table and began to write rapidly, talking as he did so : "Waldon—find out for me, Verney—no, let him find out at his end. He must fly here. See the undertaker, make the necessary arrangements for the day after tomorrow. Yes, the day after tomorrow. This"—writing rapidly—"is for *The Times*. Letter to follow. No—better send to Lawson, he's my partner. Silver. On—what's the date? Thanks. Beloved wife of Louis . . . after the birth of their son. What do you say when babies are dead? That's right—still-born. *The Times* and the *Yorkshire Post*. They all read that. Births and Deaths announcements. To Louis and Alicia Silver—a son, still-born. I want them all to know, Verney. Get those sent off."

He rose and laid his hand for an instant on Verney's shoulder.

"I'm grateful for all you're doing, for all you have done."

Verney swallowed hard. "It's nothing—really, Mr. Silver."

III

He went out into the clear, warm air, down by the river where the water boiled and foamed over the stones,

past the little chapel with its wrought-iron gate, and the little red lamp shining like a star before the altar, through the fields to where the woods began. He walked into the shadow, where his feet sank softly into the pine needles, where the coolness held a chill which made him shiver suddenly. He was scarcely conscious where he walked, only knowing that the path was familiar to him. Once or twice he stumbled; once he tripped over a half-hidden log, and fell to his knees, rising to whimper like an angry child. He stopped, his hand pressed to his side, his face twisted.

Was this how grief hurt, then? This was an actual grinding pain, which stabbed him, made the whole world black before his eyes. Perhaps the whole thing was a nightmare; he had fallen asleep in the train. He remembered how he had grudged sleeping, but his tiredness had been too much for him. How right he had been, if sleeping meant this horror! Alicia dead—that was what he had dreamed; this pain, that was part of the dream, too, as were Verney's tear-drenched eyes, his sudden bursts of emotion—all terrible, ghastly. He must make a great effort, force himself to wake and return to Alicia. . . .

He stopped, his hands clenched, then walked to where a tall pine stood, and lifting his hand drove it against the tree trunk violently. That must wake him! He felt the impact, struck again and again, then drew back, looking intently at his hand with its bleeding knuckles. No dream—he touched the scarlet trickle: wet and warm. His own blood. The pain still persisted. He had not been dreaming after all.

He went on, walking like a man in a trance, his body moving mechanically, while his brain, clear and cool once again, tortured him, forced him to remember, to wonder and question.

Remember—what had he got to remember? One evening when they had laughed, danced together, the

next morning when she had held his hands in hers as he sat on the side of her bed. Two letters—both destroyed—and her words : "You wear tails better than most men, don't you ?" That was all. That had to last him for the rest of his life—that was all he could claim as his own. She'd come to him after Bendish died ; now he was to leave her among the mountains and the skiing slopes where Roger Bendish had met death not so many months ago.

He had walked to the end of the pine wood, and emerged in a meadow, where the flowers hung their heads until the morning sun should touch and wake them. The last rays of the setting sun shone on the peak of the mountain opposite, turning the rocky crags to shining and glinting gold ; away to the east a single star shone softly bright. Once he heard the jangle of a cow-bell ; in the distance a dog barked, then silence enveloped the world again.

Louis felt that with the stilling of those two sounds his last links with the world were broken. He sat on the sloping bank of the field, his eyes staring blankly.

Alone—well, he had always been alone—until that evening when he knew that he loved Alicia, when she had, miraculously, known what he felt, had been kind, gentle and understanding. If only they could both have known what they might have found together, those months ago at Carrick. He frowned. "*If only . . .*" Change people, alter their reactions to one another, and—they weren't the same people. Louis Silver and Alicia Waldon of Carrick in the county of Yorkshire could never have loved or understood each other. They had been poles apart, and would have remained so. Only when circumstances separated, to fling them together again in this new environment, were they able to find what, before, neither of them had glimpsed in the other.

Hands clasped round his knees, he sat motionless, while the sky turned a darker, deeper blue, and the single

star was joined by others. Francis Verney, coming out of the woods, caught sight of him, and hurried forward, laying his hand on Louis' shoulder.

Silver looked up, his eyes blank, then slowly filling with comprehension.

"Verney," he said, "what are you doing here?"

"I came to look for you. I was anxious. Won't you come back to the hotel?"

Louis scrambled to his feet. "Yes, I'll come back."

"Your clothes are soaking. It's the heavy dew. We get them here."

"Yes." He ran his hands down his jacket, felt that it was saturated. Again he said, "Yes, my clothes are wet. It won't hurt me. Let's go."

As they walked he began to speak. To Verney it seemed that he spoke half to himself and was not really anxious that his companion should understand him.

"This is where I really met—Alicia," Louis said. "Only once or twice before, for a moment, I had known her—really known her—in England. Y' see, we never troubled to try to know each other at all. Out here—there was a new Alicia, and a new Louis Silver. Oh, don't think, Verney, that I shall be a changed man. I shall always do things that she would have hated. I'm not—never shall be—an estimable character. It's the old story of pig's ears and putases."

Verney said weakly, "Oh, I wouldn't say that, Mr. Silver."

"I know. That's why I'm saying it for you." He stopped and pointed to the pine woods which lay on their right. "Once I walked along that path through the woods with my wife; you were there too, Verney. When I left you both and began to walk back alone I stopped and waited. Hoped that perhaps she'd turn and wave to me. I was disappointed. I ought to have followed her, caught up with her and we could have walked on together.

As it was, she passed out of sight. That's what she's done now."

Again Verney said, speaking with some hesitancy, "Not for ever. I mean—this isn't the only life."

"Isn't it? I don't know. I know nothing about religion; don't know whether I might meet her again or whether death ends everything. I rather hope that it does. Life is a trying sort of business."

He relapsed into silence, while a little wind rustled among the pines, and the sound of the distant river rose and fell like a melody.

"I found her here, that's why I wanted to say good-bye to her—to the life I believed was waiting for me, for us—hers, and not in a church, or a graveyard, or even in some chilly death-chamber. This is where she belongs. Alicia, the pine trees, the river, those mountains towering away there." He sighed. "I've a lot to thank Tirol for, Verney."

Verney nodded. "There is a telegram from Sir Harry Waldon. It came just as I left the hotel. He will be here tomorrow about half past three."

"Ah—if he wants to take her back to England I shall oppose it. This is where she belongs. I think I shall come back here—some day."

They walked on, along the narrow field path leading through the meadows. When they came to the little chapel, with its doors of hand-wrought ironwork, Louis stopped and stared in at the old carved crucifix. Verney watched him, his face puckered with anxiety.

Pointing to the Christ, Louis said, "It's a lonely business—crucifixion. What did they call the man who did the crucifying? You don't know? Neither do I. I've done some of his work in my time. Rather glorified in it. Ugly, harsh, cruel business. Not," he added, "that there is any particular beauty in being crucified. I know that too, now." He turned and stared back up the valley, speaking to Verney, who stood at his side, without looking at him. "Tranquil," he said. "That was the

expression you used. You said that in a letter to me, and again this afternoon. My mind's full of her. Tell me anything you can, but only the truth. Not things you imagine—might help. They won't do that. What did you mean by—*tranquil, exactly, Verney?*"

"I think—I think I meant that she had no fears, no apprehensions. Not only about having the baby, but about everything. I think she felt that—well, that life was going to be good. One day she laughed a kind of secret laugh and said, 'Have you ever been to Liverpool?' I only know it as a place where you go for the National.' Then one morning when we walked along here she said that even when she went away she would always want to come back. 'We must come back, often,' she said. 'It's a generous place. It gives with both hands.' I'm afraid"—he hesitated, then gave a little miserable laugh—"I'm afraid that I have lost my capacity for chattering. I can't remember anything else—not at this moment. I shall—afterwards, I'll tell you. . . .'"

Louis continued to stare up the valley. He said mechanically, "I'm sure you will. Thanks. So she meant to come back—meant that we should come back. It's very beautiful here—the mountains, that noisy river and the fields. Queer that I am seeing it as beautiful for the first time. I see now—that lots of things—" He stopped abruptly. "That's—a bit of Celestial Surgery, I suppose. Yes, I'll come back, some day. Let's get to the hotel, Verney."

They walked back to the hotel without speaking, but as they entered Louis caught Verney's arm and held him back for a moment.

"Listen," he said, his voice quite even and emotionless; "if Waldon talks to you—if anyone talks to you—and it is quite possible that they may—remember that you cannot exaggerate my devotion—my real devotion—to my wife, or my grief at losing her—and our child. She was everything to me."

"Yes," Verney said ; "yes, of course—I mean, I should never let anyone imagine that . . . well, it's only the truth —you *were* devoted to her, and she was——"

Louis said, "Quite ! Make them understand that. Now, where are those papers ? I want all arrangements complete by the time Waldon gets here."

THE END

*Sirmione,
Lago di Garda,
Italia.
1958-59.*

What the Critics have
said about
Naomi Jacob's Novels

HONOUR—COME BACK

- Characterised by *The Eichelberger Humanitarian Committee* as a gallant work, outstanding in sincere, human appeal. An interesting and entertaining book that carries a message of justice and an appeal on behalf of the helpless.

Roger Piplett in DAILY HERALD

"This is not only a fascinating tale, but a strong plea for peace and goodwill towards all peoples."

DAILY SKETCH

"The types are drawn with humour and great observation."

NEWS CHRONICLE

"Well-told tale, related with all Miss Naomi Jacob's skill and energy."

EVERYMAN

"Fertile of incident, lavish in its range of settings, and excellent in its war atmosphere."

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

"There are some writers whose books are always sure of a welcome and among these Naomi Jacob must certainly be counted."

SUNDAY DISPATCH

"Miss Jacob at her best . . . Real people."

BRITANNIA AND EVE

"As good a story of the European War as has been written by any Englishwoman."

THE SCOTSMAN

"A powerful and deftly constructed study shot with a fine poetic quality and exhibiting a deep understanding."

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TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

"Miss Jacob has an undoubtable gift of story-telling . . . she has the knack of carrying one along with her and keeping one interested."

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"As a character study, this is on a level with all Miss Jacob's good work."

POOR STRAWS

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MANCHESTER GUARDIAN

"A pleasant chronicle of a Yorkshire family whose simple and unpretentious parents have produced a variegated brood of swans and geese. There is plenty of incident . . . none of her pages is dull."

FADE OUT

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"This highly coloured story holds the interest throughout."

NEWS CHRONICLE

"Natural story-telling is Miss Naomi Jacob's gift and in *Fade Out* she is at her best."

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"As in all Miss Jacob's novels, the story unfolds with a natural ease that consoles while it also proves her cunning craftsmanship."

MORNING POST

"All the people are excellently alive . . . Miss Jacob knows the stage and the films at first hand and not through the medium of the usual outsider's beglamoured imagination; all of which helps her general realistic atmosphere enormously."

THE SCOTSMAN

"Miss Naomi Jacob is an accomplished story-teller who creates living characters and places them in credible and dramatic situations . . . the story moves easily and naturally, the characters are interesting and the background of theatre stage and film studio is sketched in convincingly."

ROOTS

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Cecil Roberts in THE SPHERE

"Miss Jacob maintains her high standard . . . Sarah Ann is a magnificent creation. Miss Jacob has the great gift of creating characters, of constructing a natural and vigorous dialogue, and the skill to weave a sound plot."

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"The solution of Sarah Ann's problem shows us Miss Jacob at her most expert. She handles it skilfully and with deep insight; a thoroughly readable story."

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS

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"Miss Jacob gives a moving impression . . . there is a fine sense of drama."

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LIVERPOOL POST

"The tale moves dramatically to a climax whose ironic twist is not the least factor in its effectiveness. The gallery of portraits is a striking one . . . a powerful and impressive creation."

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"Naomi Jacob's reputation as a novelist is now definitely made by this book . . . Jael and Paris, with Mary Ellen in a minor degree, make the book. As imagined and developed by Naomi Jacob they would make any book."

SATURDAY REVIEW

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PROPS

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"*Props* is certainly worth reading, if only for its study of the relationship between Jew and Gentile."

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"A well-managed, sympathetic history, and the Jewish scenes give it colour. People are definitely likable or dislikable in it, and they move with real animation."

MORNING POST

"Miss Jacob has succeeded in achieving one of the difficult feats of fiction. She has taken, as her central character, a largely negative type and she has made him lovable and really understandable . . . She has a quite unusual feeling for character. There is hardly one person throughout the book who is not clearly defined."

NEWS CHRONICLE

"Miss Jacob combines with a sensitive and penetrating mind a most pleasant gift for narrative."

SCOTSMAN

"It is a sensitive piece of character drawing. Her story is solid, has a rich rounded feeling, and rises to considerable heights in passages of intense drama."

SHEFFIELD TELEGRAPH

"This is an original, strong, and scathing work in Miss Jacob's best manner. It is not all harsh; there is gentleness in the treatment of the leading figure and in several of the Jewish portraits. But while Miss Jacob can be sympathetic, she can also be uncompromising, and she is always sincere and clear in expression. A very good book."

YOUNG EMMANUEL

TELEGRAPH

"Miss Jacob depicts the characteristically clannish spirit of the Goldnitz family with a sureness that is evidence of her powers of observation."

SPECTATOR

"I delighted in *Young Emmanuel*, and was genuinely sorry to finish it."

THE SPHERE

"Miss Jacob has the true gift that gives to her figures a symbolic importance, and in following the temptation of Emmanuel we see, as often in Conrad's work, the severe testing of the human soul. It is a work of grave and singular distinction."

REFEREE

"Here we have a novel of Jewish life which is neither sentimental nor exclusive in its appeal to racial feeling; wins sympathy by virtue of its objective character-drawing and fine narrative power . . . Such a solid achievement as *Young Emmanuel* should not go unnoticed. It is told with strong but disciplined energy in a style which is at once certain and sensitive."

Howard Spring in the EVENING STANDARD

"*Young Emmanuel* was, to me, a revelation . . . The naturalness and spontaneity with which the tale unfolds itself are remarkable; there is a feeling of mobility and understanding about it, and Miss Jacob has the true novelist's gift of making clear and vital even the people who move in the background."

BOOKFINDER

"The author has presented a problem of vital interest, and has handled the situation well, treating it in a bold and yet delicate fashion . . . A fine study of humanity."

GROPING

DAILY TELEGRAPH

"Has all the elements of a popular success . . . This is a novel possessing many solid merits."

TIME AND TIDE

"This novel is primarily a study of father and son . . . The increasing tension of their relations are convincingly portrayed . . . Miss Jacob's crisp narrative style and range of character combine in a solid achievement."

E. M. Delafield in the MORNING POST

"*Groping* is a very interesting book indeed. It is a careful and penetrating study in male psychology, and incidentally a well-constructed story into the bargain."

THE SPHERE

"It has Miss Jacob's customary ability and verve. It is rich with incident and acute feeling, and, unlike so many modern novels, the canvas is covered in every inch."

LIVERPOOL POST

"An absorbing story . . . Miss Jacob writes with admirable clarity, and a sense of character-development that makes this story one of continuous and progressive interest."

EVENING STANDARD

"Confirms one's impression that the writer has more than the usual capacity for creating human beings."

THE LENIENT GOD

SUNDAY TIMES

"The Warrens are a delightful family . . . There is an air about the whole book which is highly attractive. "Gean", from Yorkshire, is a great figure."

EVENING STANDARD

"There are three classes of people whom Miss Jacob knows well—Jews, Cockneys, and Yorkshire folk. All three are woven into the texture of this book."

DAILY MIRROR

"Miss Jacob's characterization is—as always—brilliant."

TATLER

"The tale is told with humour, with beauty, with shrewdness, but above all with great human understanding. I don't think Miss Jacob has ever written a finer novel."

BIRMINGHAM POST

"She gets very near to human nature in her conditions . . . Her characters are reliably drawn, with vivid detail and a full fund of humour to round off the corners."

TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

"A charming story, rich in humour, in humanity, in beauty and the stern common sense that Yorkshire people import . . . Every character in the book is vivid . . . Should enhance her reputation as a creator of character and a gripping story teller."

NO EASY WAY

SUNDAY TIMES

"Fast-moving and full of incident and character study."

TIMES

"Plenty of action and diversity of character . . . an entertaining picture."

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"This excellent tale-teller!"

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QUEEN

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"Told neatly and dramatically by a most competent writer."

STRAWS IN AMBER

SUNDAY TIMES

"Will please any recipient who has a taste for the footlights and will be enjoyed by readers who prefer human nature to sentiment and violence."

DAILY TELEGRAPH

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MANCHESTER GUARDIAN

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"Full of warm humanity."

